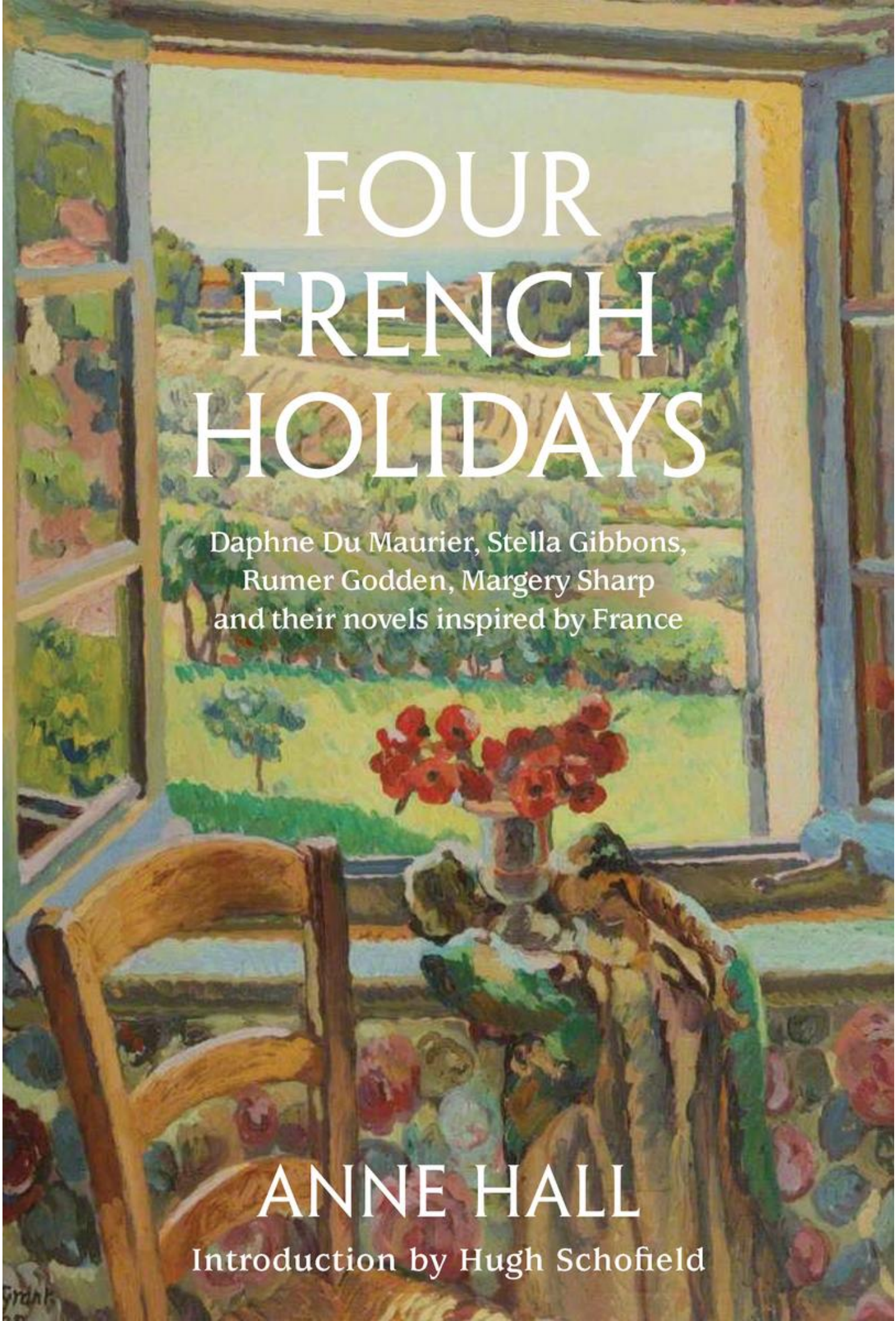
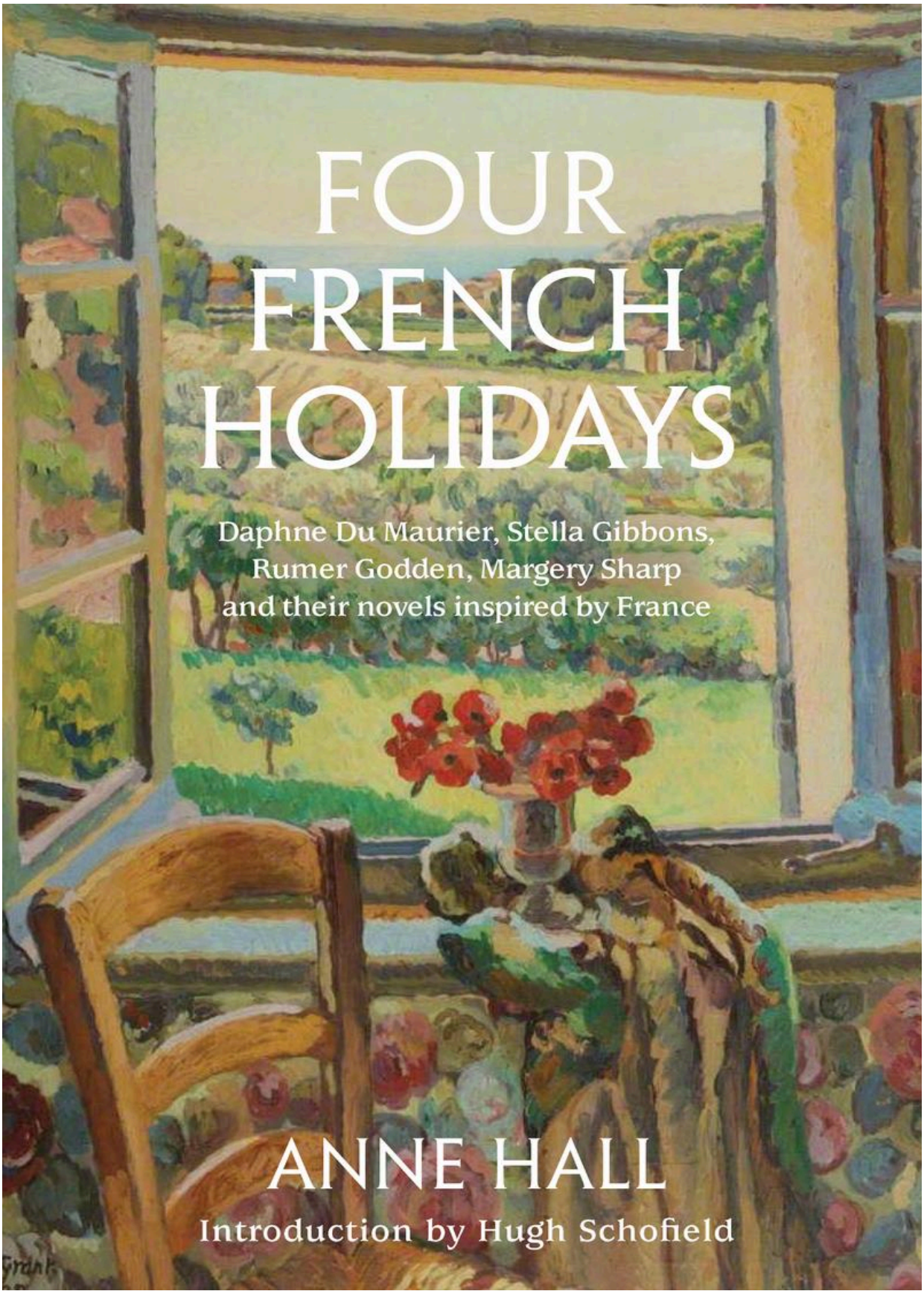


FOUR FRENCH HOLIDAYS

Daphne Du Maurier, Stella Gibbons,
Rumer Godden, Margery Sharp
and their novels inspired by France

ANNE HALL

Introduction by Hugh Schofield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UNICORN

‘Everyone’s always going to France.
Especially in the summer holidays.’

LYDIA PRELUDE IN MARGERY SHARP, *IN PIOUS MEMORY*

‘I don’t understand why you should be so interested in my country.’

COUNT JEAN DE GUÉ

IN DAPHNE DU MAURIER, *THE SCAPEGOAT*

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INTRODUCTION

The *Spectator* 'Low Life' columnist, Jeremy Clarke, wrote once about the joys of tracking down the haunts of literary figures from the past – finding where they lived or stayed, and then trying to conjure up in his mind the *genius loci* that might have inspired them. He was talking about Katherine Mansfield – a particular obsession of his – and on a visit to her Villa Isola Bella in Menton he wondered hopefully if he might be 'annoyed by a distant ancestor of one of the mosquitos that bit lumps out of her'.

It was, he concluded all a bit of a fool's errand. The spirit of place was too elusive. There was no touchstone to transport him back to a bygone age. Modern reality – to say nothing of the mosquitos – kept impinging. Nonetheless, he decided that however scant the rewards, the quest was still worth making. *Ça valait le detour.*

I share the fascination. Over a quarter of a century as a journalist in France, I have found excuses to follow the traces of not a few British authors. The terrain, it has to be said, is propitious. From Laurence Sterne and his *Sentimental Journey*, writers have been constantly crossing the Channel in search of escape or inspiration, or maybe just because France was the nearest place that counted as abroad.

Charles Dickens showed off his knowledge of the country in *Little Dorrit* and, of course, *A Tale of Two Cities*. Arnold Bennett described the guillotining of a criminal in Auxerre in *The Old Wives' Tale*, though he admitted he had not actually witnessed one. My literary wanderings have taken me to a villa in Le Touquet in search of P.G. Wodehouse (he was there when the Germans arrived in 1940 and took him into captivity); the drawing-rooms of the Latin Quarter in search of the nineteenth-century salonnière Mary Clarke Mohl; Fontainebleau in search of the aforementioned Katherine Mansfield (she died there while a pupil of the Armenian mystic George Gurdjieff) as well as Patricia Highsmith (she lived there, as did her anti-hero Tom Ripley); the *Route Nationale 79* near Nevers in search of Ian Fleming (I am convinced I found the bridge underneath which Auric Goldfinger left a

cache of gold for his Soviet masters); and a cemetery near my home in Sancerre for the forgotten First World War poet Richard Aldington.

Two of the most rewarding quests were ones on which, I was pleased to discover later, Anne Hall was also engaged.

Rumer Godden is a particular heroine of mine. Re-reading *The Greengage Summer* – including an introduction in which Godden described the real events behind the book – I started wondering what might still be left of the Château-Thierry which she first saw as a schoolgirl in 1923. In particular, was the hotel that framed the plot still standing? From Godden's magical descriptions, I could see it exactly in my mind's eye, with its formal garden and then the plum orchard stretching down to a stone wall, and a door in the wall opening on to the river. By sheer fluke, an internet search revealed a recent article in the local newspaper about a hotel that answered the description perfectly. The Hôtel des Violettes had been founded by an Englishwoman after the First World War, and in the interwar years was a well-known hostelry, catering in particular for war tourists. Sadly it had been hit by a bomb in the Second World War. The building was demolished and later replaced by the local *gendarmerie*. It was the closure of this *gendarmerie* a couple of years ago that prompted the reminiscences in the local paper.

My visit to Château-Thierry set off in me a paroxysm of nostalgia – which was odd because I had never been there before, my feelings were based entirely on a book written more than sixty years ago, and dealing with events that took place thirty-five years before that! Despite the destruction of the years, the site of the hotel and the orchard was clearly identifiable. The door in the wall leading to the river is surely the one that is still there today, and the bathing spots where the children came with Eliot cannot have changed either. Truth be told, I had a Clarkean moment of near-communion with the literary past.

Subsequently, I was inspired by reading Daphne Du Maurier's *The Glass-Blowers* to find out more about *her* French connections. I cannot say the novel is my favourite of the Du Maurier oeuvre, but it opened up a story of which I was totally ignorant. Two stories, in fact. First, the story of the *ancien régime* glass-blowing industry in the Perche and other wooded parts of France, with its traditions and rituals and hierarchies. And then the story of Daphne Du Maurier's own ancestors – the self-imposed exile in London of her glass-blowing great-great-grandfather during the Revolution, and how those French roots affected her famous grandfather and father, George and Gerald, and indeed Daphne herself. The high point of my visit to the region

for the BBC was finding the old farmhouse – Le Maurier – where her ancestor was born in 1749.

Anne Hall was my guide in the Du Maurier investigation. She lives in the Perche and is recognised there as *the* expert in all things Maurier-esque. Shortly after our first meeting, she told me how she was also working on a study of Rumer Godden and the Château-Thierry connection of *The Greengage Summer*. Here was a woman clearly after my own heart. Indeed, with understandable excitement she let me know that she had actually tracked down the identity of the enigmatic Eliot, the Englishman in the book who charmed the children but also turned out to be a thief and murderer. This was news! I myself had spent a day in the local records office in Rheims leafing through contemporary newspapers in search of a reference to an English renegade. But I had drawn a complete blank. Anne Hall was more assiduous than I, and I think her conclusion about Eliot is probably correct.

Of Stella Gibbons I am afraid I only know *Cold Comfort Farm* (I am not alone – she complained in her lifetime that people only remembered her for that!) and of Margery Sharp I know nothing. However, they are two other women of the same generation as Godden and Du Maurier who in the middle decades of the last century travelled to France and used their time here as a source for literary creation. All four women came and were inspired and left their traces. Anne Hall has taken the time to search out those traces.

Hugh Schofield
Paris, September 2022

THE WESTERN FRONT

AUGUST 1923

CHAMPAGNE COUNTRY

‘We are going,’ said Mam, ‘to the Battlefields of France’ – she said those words in capitals – ‘and perhaps when you see the rows and rows of crosses for those young men who gave their lives for you, it might make you stop and think of your selfishness.’

– RUMER GODDEN, *A TIME TO DANCE, NO TIME TO WEEP*

Mother had been thinking of the battlefields; she had not thought to enquire about the country itself; I am sure she had not meant to bring us to a luxury corner of France where the trees and the vines changed almost symbolically in the autumn to gold.

– RUMER GODDEN, *THE GREENGAGE SUMMER*

Rumer Godden was born in Eastbourne, Sussex in December 1907, the second of Arthur and Katherine Godden’s four daughters. When she was ten months old, she, her sister Jon (christened Winsome Ruth, but always called Jon for ‘Jonquil’), their mother, and a nurse left Eastbourne to re-join Arthur in the houseboat in Assam where Jon had been born.

Discussing her childhood in her memoir, Rumer comments that ‘it must seem we go back and forth to India like shuttlecocks, which we did’. When she and Jon were ages five and six respectively, they spent a dismal year living with their paternal grandmother and unmarried aunts in Maida Vale. After the First World War broke out, it was decided that the girls should return to their parents, their two younger sisters and the family’s new home in Bengal, where Arthur Godden managed a steamship company. Rumer wrote about these years in *The River*, and *Two Under the Indian Sun* (co-authored with Jon).

In 1920, the entire family went back to Eastbourne for the girls’ schooling but shortly thereafter Arthur had to return to his job in India. In their father’s absence their mother’s older brother, Alfred Edward Hingley, an Eastbourne solicitor, became his nieces’ ‘proxy father’. Rumer’s Uncle Alfred appears as ‘Uncle William’ in *The Greengage Summer*; her fictional alter ego

comments, ‘I sometimes wondered if he ranked Father as a scallywag, but he did not say it and Uncle William said most things.’

During their first two years in Eastbourne, Rumer and Jon attended five different schools, which they mostly detested. They did not even last a full term at the first one, a boarding school at a High Anglican Convent. They also disliked Eastbourne itself, and their discontent led them to occasionally bully their mother.

Katherine Godden’s response took her daughters’ breath away: the family would spend the middle of the summer holidays on a battlefield tour of France, even though Mrs Godden had never been to the Continent and did not speak French. Rumer wrote in *The Greengage Summer*, ‘“This is college,” said Mother. “It is education. You need to learn … what I cannot teach you,” said Mother, her voice quivering.’

The plan was that after three weeks at the seaside in Normandy, the Goddens would travel by train to Rouen where Joan of Arc was burnt at the stake – ‘St Joan, too, might make you think’ – and then on to Château-Thierry in the Champagne region. An elderly Theosophist friend in Eastbourne recommended the Hôtel des Violettes, a sort of château – in fact a former bourgeois residence – that had been the American army headquarters during the war. It had a large orchard and a private swimming cove on the banks of the river Marne.

In the novel Godden describes her family’s train journey from Dieppe via Paris:

> It was altogether a disappointing as well as a dismaying day. From the train France did not look very different from England; it had the Constable, Peter Rabbit colours we had grown up with, and in Paris we did not see the Louvre, nor the shops, nor eat strawberry tarts. We did not buy a single postcard, nor take a photograph; we waited in the waiting-room for Mother to get well.

On the beach in Normandy, Katherine Godden had been bitten by a horsefly and on the train journey she became more and more unwell. On arriving in Château-Thierry she was diagnosed with septicaemia, particularly dangerous in the days before penicillin, and sent to the hospital. The planned week in Château-Thierry was necessarily extended, and during this time the four Godden children were essentially left on their own, at the mercy of the hotel staff and the other guests.

Over a quarter of a century after her stay in Château-Thierry, Rumer Godden, now a celebrated novelist, married her second husband James

Haynes-Dixon. Shortly thereafter she made one of her many visits to India: this time it was to assist filmmaker Jean Renoir in the production of a film based on her semi-autobiographical novel, *The River*.

Once the film was completed, Rumer returned to England and worked on a first draft of what became *The Greengage Summer*. On visiting Château-Thierry to check on details for her novel, she found that the Hôtel des Violettes had been bombed in the Second World War:

> [It] was rubble; I only recognized it by a shred of the blue satin wallpaper on part of a wall left standing in what had been the dining-room. There was a sad stillness as I stood there looking at it but the sounds of the river came from beyond the door in the garden wall and, in the orchard, the greengages were ripe.

Jane Asher, Susannah York, Rumer Godden, Elizabeth Dear, Katherine Godden and Kenneth More on the film set of *The Greengage Summer*

The Greengage Summer was published in 1958 and a few years later it, too, was made into a film, with the actresses Susannah York and Jane Asher in the roles originally based on Jon and Rumer Godden.

In 1987 and 1989, in her eighties, Rumer returned twice more to that summer in passages of her memoirs *A Time to Dance, No Time to Weep* and *A House with Four Rooms*. In the latter book she comments, ‘It is difficult,

with the novel and the film that followed it, to disentangle what actually happened, what was transposed in the novel, and what has been overlaid by the film; each seems to shimmer through the others.'

It has now been almost a century since Rumer's 'greengage summer', and new light can be shed on the colourful characters she and her sisters encountered in Château-Thierry.

THE HÔTEL DES VIOLETTES

During the summer of 1923, Rumer was fifteen; her sister Jon turned seventeen that August. The owner of the Hôtel des Violettes was Violet Grierson, a middle-aged British woman of some notoriety. *A Time to Dance* describes her:

> Madame – I will call her Madame Chenal – was kind; few hotel keepers would have accepted a critically ill foreign woman with four children; the doctor was there that night and she comforted and reassured us, calling in an Englishwoman, a Mrs Martin staying in the hotel who, herself, had a small girl.

Godden adds that 'Mr Martin […] was English too, young, slim with lazy good manners and perfectly dressed.'

Perhaps it was Violet Grierson's notoriety – not only in Château-Thierry but also, to an extent, in America – that led Godden to 'disguise' her, in both the memoir and the novel, as a Frenchwoman. Violet's Scottish grandfather, David Grierson, was a medical doctor who went to India as a young man and became Inspector-General of Hospitals in the Indian Army. Violet's father, John, who was born in India, became an army colonel. He married an Irishwoman in Bombay; Violet was born in 1876 in Athlone, and her younger sister, Helen, was probably also born in Ireland. Violet and Helen's two brothers were born in Poona and Rangoon, in 1880 and 1881 respectively. Like the Godden children, the four Griersons apparently spent their early years with their parents in Asia.

Violet's brief marriage to Neville Campbell Pullin ended in divorce, and during the war she worked with the British Committee of the French Red Cross. She was awarded both the silver medal of the Reconnaissance Française and the Croix de Guerre 'for services rendered during four years at canteen work, especially for remaining on duty at Serches during the days of the 27th to the 31st May [1918], in spite of violent bombardments, until the extreme limits of prudence'.

After the war Violet Grierson Pullin started a tea-room in Château-Thierry, and later, in what had once been the residence of a medical doctor, the Hôtel du Bonhomme, also called the Hôtel du Bonhomme et des Violettes. In the years following the Goddens' stay, the hotel was mentioned in the American press on several occasions.

Château-Thierry, Hôtel du Bonhomme et des Violettes

While touring the battlefields in August 1924, W.D. Longyear, the father of an American soldier who had been killed in Château-Thierry, was impressed by the shell-scarred bronze statue of a hunter boy and hounds in the entrance court to the Hostellerie. (Before becoming a hotel, the bourgeois residence had been briefly occupied by the German army, and it then became the American headquarters.) Longyear negotiated with the French government to buy the statue in honour of his son, and on Armistice Day 1925 it was unveiled at his Beverly Hills estate. (Its current location is on Santa Monica Boulevard.)

In 1927, the tenth anniversary of the US joining the war, several newspapers published a full page titled 'Changed France Will Greet the Returning Doughboys'. The following item appeared beneath the heading 'Historic Wood in this Bench':

> Madame Violette Pullin Grierson, Hôtel du Bonhomme, Château-Thierry, France is photographed seated on a bench in her garden made

of blocks of wood from Belleau Wood [the site of a ferocious battle] and a stretcher used to carry American wounded into the Hôtel Bonhomme in 1918. There is a story in France now that the Hôtel Bonhomme is haunted, for, it is said, the tall glass windows overlooking the garden, crack incessantly at night.

—Wide World Photo.

LIVING AMONG MEMORIES—Mme. Violette Pullin, war widow, is present proprietor of Hostellerie du Bonhomme, at Chateau-Thierry, which during the world war served as headquarters for American forces. Mme. Pullin is of British nationality, but received French war cross during conflict in which she lost two brothers and her husband.

Madame Violette Pullin

The photograph of Madame Pullin and her dogs is accompanied by an article about the 'haunted' hotel, which includes the statement that Violet's husband

was an English naval officer who was killed when his ship was torpedoed in 1914. (Records show instead that after their divorce in 1912 her ex-husband, who remarried, lived until 1940.)

Finally, in 1930 the American *Illustrated Daily News* printed a photograph of Madame Violette Pullin, war widow, with the title 'Living Among Memories'. It is said that she lost not only her husband, but two brothers in the war. Both brothers were soldiers who fought on the Western Front, yet only the elder one was killed; the younger one, who was wounded, lived until 1962.

These articles date from the 1920s – decades before Godden wrote *The Greengage Summer* – and there is no reason to think she had any knowledge of them. Yet they curiously support her sense of the Hôtel des Violettes as a haunted and haunting place, propitious to narrative invention.

THE HÔTEL DES OEILLETS (CARNATIONS)

In *The Greengage Summer*, Château-Thierry's Hôtel des Violettes becomes the Hôtel des OEillets in Vieux-Moutiers. The narrator, Cecil (for Cecilia) Grey, is the second oldest daughter of a botanist who is currently on an expedition in Tibet. His wife and children have come to Vieux-Moutiers from Southstone (for Eastbourne).

Where the Goddens had four girls, the Greys have four girls and a boy: Joss (for Joanna), Cecil, Hester, Willmouse (for William) and Vicky, who are respectively sixteen, thirteen, ten, seven and four. In the opening pages Cecil explains that as a child she wanted to be a writer or a nun, although 'At the moment I was more like a chameleon, coloured by other people's business,' identifying in turn with each of her sisters and her brother. The adult narrator, telling the story of the greengage summer, wonders if it might not actually belong to her elder sister:

> 'You are the one who should write this,' I told Joss, 'it happened chiefly to you'; but Joss shut that out, as she always shuts out things, or shuts them in so that no one can guess.
>
> 'You are the one who likes words,' said Joss. 'Besides…' and she paused. 'It happened as much to you.'

The weary travellers arrive at Les OEillets around nine on a hot night in early August. In the elegant hall of the hotel, Cecil feels, 'our fibre suitcases looked cheap'. There is no kind Madame Chenal, as in the memoir; instead there is a Madame Corbet at the reception who informs the Greys she cannot accept either sick people or unaccompanied children. She directs the family to the police station, agreeing only to let them leave their luggage temporarily. As if on cue, the hotel owner, Mademoiselle Zizi de Presle, appears on the entresol landing dressed in evening clothes, accompanied by Eliot.

Three figures mentioned in Godden's memoir disappear completely from *The Greengage Summer*: a French-Canadian called Jean-Pierre, who is the companion of the hotelkeeper Madame Chenal, and Mrs Martin and her

four-year-old daughter. These deletions allow the Mr Martin of the memoir to become Eliot in the novel, the companion of Mademoiselle Zizi de Presle who owns the Hôtel des OEillets.

Eliot is the 'ace' of that first evening and the mysterious hero of *The Greengage Summer*. His clothes are impeccable:

> It seems strange now that, seeing a man and woman both in full evening dress, we looked at the man first, but there was no question about it. Hester gave a little gasp.
> 'Were you ever a sailor?' Joss asked Eliot afterwards. I knew what she meant; he was tall and brown and lean, as were sailors in magazine pictures.
> 'Probably,' said Eliot.
> 'Don't you know?' asked Hester incredulous.
> 'I know I was a soldier,' said Eliot. 'Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man, poor man …' but Hester interrupted him.
> 'You can't have been everything,' she said.
> 'I pretty well was,' said Eliot.

That evening he is wearing medals, and has 'a carnation in his buttonhole, a dark-red one, and it seemed to symbolise Eliot for us':

> Why are flowers bought by men so much more notable than those bought by women? I do not know, but they are. Father brought flowers into the house but they were dried, pressed brown, the life gone out of them; with Eliot the flower was alive.

Due to their mother's illness and the absence of both their father and their Uncle William, Eliot becomes the temporary guardian of the Grey children. When he sees them for the first time, his response is: 'Good God! An orphanage!' But he then insists Madame Corbet ring the doctor and open rooms for the Greys. Eliot later apologises for his remark about the orphanage:

> 'But you were all wearing grey flannel,' he said, and he asked, 'Why were you wearing grey flannel?'
> Hester looked at him. 'Perhaps you haven't been in England for a long time,' she said gently. 'Those were our school clothes.'

On awakening on her first morning in the hotel, Cecil finds her elder sister Joss is having one of her recurring attacks of nerves or biliousness, followed

a few days later by what she calls ‘Eve’s curse’. This leaves Cecil temporarily in charge of her three younger siblings; she comments, ‘It was an odd world without Joss or Mother.’

When Cecil ventures downstairs, the door on the landing opens and a man comes out of what she later learns is Mademoiselle Zizi’s room: ‘He was wearing a silk patterned dressing-gown – like an actor’s, I thought – leather slippers, and was smoking a cigarette. It was Eliot […] another Eliot than the kind Englishman of last night; someone cold and … ruthless, I thought.’

After giving the younger children their breakfast, Cecil sends them out to explore the hotel grounds; then she herself goes out on the terrace and down the steps:

> […] I walked into the orchard and, before I knew what I had done, reached up to touch a greengage. It came off, warm and smooth, into my hand. I looked quickly round, but no one came, no voice scolded and, after a moment, I bit into the ripe golden flesh. Then I ate another, and another until replete with fruit and ecstasy, I went back to my post.

After a few moments, ‘Eliot came out. He was aloof and unapproachable. How did I know then that he had these times? I do not know, but, as if the first greengage had been an Eden apple, I was suddenly older and wiser and did not try to speak to him.’

Back in the hotel Mademoiselle Zizi has been examining the Greys’ passports and she is about to contact the children’s uncle in Southstone. Mrs Grey has just the strength to ask Cecil to fetch ‘that man who was English’: Eliot. Over Mademoiselle Zizi’s objections, Cecil brings Eliot to her mother’s room, where she begs him not to send for anyone. ‘When Eliot came I knew how good he was. “Not good,” said Hester, who was exact. “A good person would not have done it. Not good – kind,” which was nearer our hearts.’ Mrs Grey is transferred to the hospital, but her brother is not summoned.

Eliot may be kind, but Cecil later overhears him making an odd remark. He tells his companion that, if necessary, he will pay the Greys’ hotel bill, and adds that the children can be useful: ‘[They] will give me a reason for being here. After all, now I’m their guardian. They can be camouflage.’

Cecil fights with Paul, the kitchen boy who works all hours and sleeps under the stairs, when he calls the Greys ‘enfants trouvés’ (strays). But that evening he offers Cecil a Gauloise, and Hester and she begin regularly waiting for Paul to finish work in order to sit outside with him, finishing bottles of wine and smoking (although the two girls are only ten and

thirteen). Paul is said to be the son of a woman who had ‘gone with the soldiers’; after the war he was found in the American camp.

Once they make it through the bewildering first day at the hotel, the children settle and soon begin to feel they might have been living in Vieux-Moutiers all their lives. Northern France and southern England looked similar from the train, Cecil had remarked, but she now begins to appreciate the differences between Vieux-Moutiers and Southstone:

> [A]fter Southstone this old French town, drenched that year in sun, seemed especially beautiful. Southstone had not grown; it had been built in a few years as a watering place. Its red-brick houses with slated roofs stood in well-ordered asphalt roads, planted neatly with laburnum and bright pink may trees, each cased in a stand of wire-netting; it had a Winter Garden for concerts, a skating rink, covered tennis courts, swimming baths, tea rooms and large shops. Its cliffs were cut up into municipal gardens, its foreshore into a parade with a bandstand and pier, a Round Tower, clock-golf course and an aquarium. Vieux-Moutiers, beside its wide peaceful river, was centuries old; its upper and lower town had grown slowly, haphazardly, or crumbled away with disuse. It was so small that one could not get lost, though it had a maze of tiny cobbled lanes around the Place, where the market was held twice a week in front of the Hôtel de Ville […].

The passage goes on to mention a famous poet who Godden names in her memoir: ‘In the upper town, a particular cream-washed house with marigold-coloured stains on its walls bore a plaque saying that the poet, La Fontaine of the *Fables*, had lived there.’

In Southstone, Cecil feels,

> […] [I]t was as if a pattern-mould were being pressed down on us into which we could not fit. For one thing we were much poorer than the people we knew, poor to be Uncle William’s sister, nieces and nephew; and we had this curiously absent father while other girls’ fathers went to offices and caught trains and belonged to the Sussex Club. Mother too was not like other mothers, nor like a grown-up at all; she patently preferred being with Vicky or Willmouse or any of us than playing bridge, or organising bazaars, or having coffee or luncheon or tea with the select Southstone ladies.

In short, ‘We were odd, belonging and not belonging, and odd is an uncomfortable thing to be; we did not want to belong but were humiliated that we did not.’ In Vieux-Moutiers, on the other hand, ‘we were foreigners, which was more comfortable than being odd; the town was accustomed to tourists and nobody stared at us; we had achieved an obscurity that was strangely restful’.

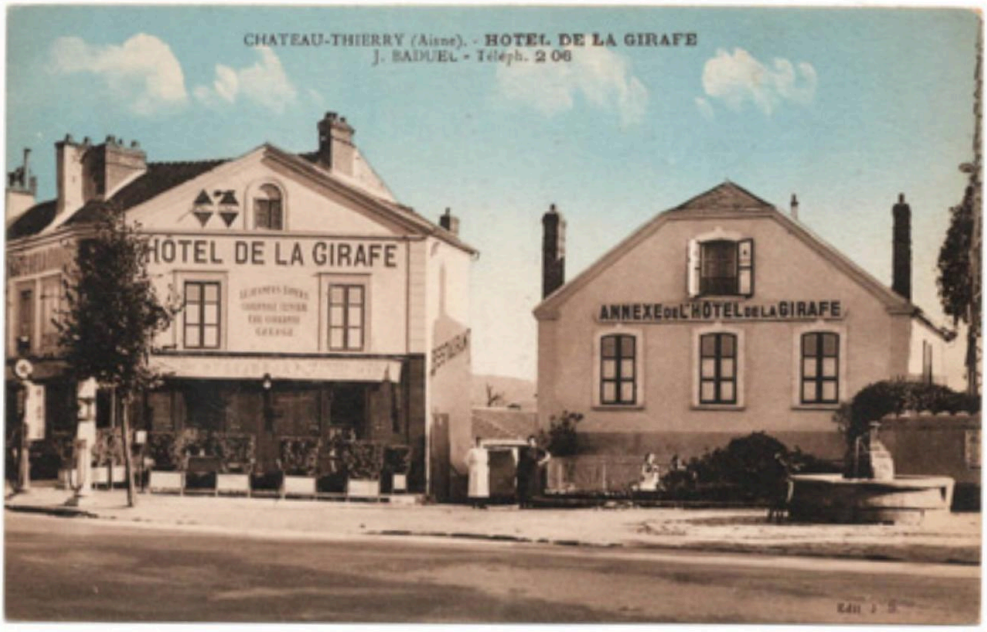
Another difference is that in Southstone the children ‘had […] been chiefly with girls and women, and had been ruled by Mother, who made a private child’s world for us; now suddenly we were surrounded by a public and almost rude life’. Paul informs Cecil that Madame Corbet is secretly in love with Mademoiselle Zizi, and that Zizi’s companion, Eliot, does not love her: ‘Coming from our Eden world of Belmont Road [in Southstone] I was like a young novice horse who jumps too high, while Paul had been born an imp of the world, the real world.’ Paul first made love at fourteen, he tells Cecil, who begins to feel ‘stained’ by what she hears from him, and even that ‘It was I, not Paul, who was bad.’

Paul observes that Monsieur Eliot seems to possess nothing; he has discovered that the chest of drawers in Eliot’s room does not contain a single photograph, piece of paper, or anything beyond his clothes. Cecil and Hester have noticed the sharp paperknife Eliot carries. ‘We thought it was silver, but I suppose now it was steel, thin, about twelve inches long. “Thirteen,” said Eliot, “my lucky number. Its blade was sharp pointed, with bevelled edges.”’ He claims to have inherited his high cheekbones from his Chinese grandmother, and he says the knife came to him ‘From my ancestor, Genghis Khan.’ Rumer Godden adds that ‘it still seems to me now that his hands and feet were so small as to be oriental’.

Eliot liked to sunbathe in the cove after having lunch at the hotel: ‘He would not strip but let the sun soak through his clothes, his head and eyes shielded by an old yachting cap.’ He would often stay there until four o’clock, when the children went inside for their goûter. Four o’clock was rest-time for the cook, Monsieur Armand, who made the children ‘pay’ by reciting tongue-twisters or, in Cecil’s case, translating items from the newspaper: ‘I learned more French in the kitchen at Les OEillets than even in the punishments at St Helena’s’ (learning French poetry by heart was a punishment at St Helena’s boarding school).

After their goûter the children race back to the cove to see if Eliot is sunbathing there. If he has gone to the Giraffe café, they await his return. ‘I like that man,’ says Vicky, the youngest; ‘And I like him,’ adds her brother Will. Hester uses the last bit of film in her camera to take a snapshot of Eliot asleep in his deckchair. Under Eliot’s spell the children accept everything,

trust everything. But when he is in Paris, 90 km away, as he often is, ‘we became suspicious and very critical indeed’.



Château-Thierry, the Giraffe Hotel

As Godden explains it in her memoir:

> Soon our feelings about the battlefields and the war grew cynical – we could hardly help it; almost every day, coachloads of tourists visited that part of France, most of them Americans come to see where their fathers, husbands or sons lay in this foreign soil and, of course, the American Headquarters were of great interest so that luncheon at the Hôtel des Violettes was on their itineraries. The château had been under fire and the panelling of the staircase had been spattered by machine guns; every morning the kitchen boy came with a gimlet and opened the holes again. With raw liver, he freshened up the bloodstains in the billiard room that had been the guard room where men had died. Mam would have been shocked to know we thought it funny.

In the novel, Cecil comments, ‘I was thinking how impressed we had been the first day, how war and death had seemed so close that we had felt almost as Mother had wanted us to feel – ashamed and … holy? I thought. Now I felt a fool and I did not like Mademoiselle Zizi or Madame Corbet or Paul; they made Les OEillets horrid, I thought.’

Fortunately, the children are turned out of the house every day when the first lunch guests arrive. As soon as they are on the far side of the box hedge in the garden, the hotel 'was as unreal as the cocktails they all drank or as the top garden with its cut-up flowerbeds of plants […], its boxes, its gravel, its iron urn, the [soldier's] skull buried every day. On the wilderness and orchard side was an older, more truthful world […].'

On Eliot's suggestion, Paul regularly packs picnic lunches for the children and when the clock strikes one, they open them:

> Monsieur Armand told [Paul] to put aside yesterday's dinner rolls for us, last night's meat, now cold, sardines and eggs out of the hors-d'oeuvres, but Paul would switch the rolls with fresh ones just carried into the kitchen in the baker's wooden trays, and steal chicken legs, éclairs or jam tarts and, in the kindness of his heart, pâté, even caviar […]. To us who were used to picnics of hard-boiled eggs, potted-meat sandwiches, apples and milk chocolate, Les OEillets picnics were banquets; to add to their wonder we were always given bottles of wine and water to drink.

The afternoon hours that the four youngest Grey children spend in the orchard or by the river, away from the adults, allow them to simply *be* children, and this, according to Cecil, is what keeps them sane.

JOSS RECOVERS

This new routine is broken after about a week, however, when Joss, the children's eldest sister, has recovered and is able to come downstairs for meals. The children had previously dined early, alongside the hotel staff, but because Joss will be there they dress for dinner and play cards as they wait for her to arrive. Eliot has returned from Paris, and a French family is also dining in the restaurant that night. Cecil overhears Eliot telling the French guests that Mrs Grey is his sister; he has brought her and her children over from England because he could not get away from France to see them.

Cecil suddenly becomes aware that Eliot and two male guests are staring at the staircase, watching Joss descend. She is wearing the twin of Cecil's cotton dress, which somehow looks better on her, as well as her new, open-toed sandals. Eliot asks Joss if she wants a drink and sends Willmouse to ask for a lemon. Mademoiselle Zizi brings the lemon; as she and Joss stand side by side, Cecil notices Eliot staring at the two pairs of feet:

> Mademoiselle Zizi was wearing sandals too, open-toed black ones with high heels; they showed her toenails painted deep red, but the toes were brown and twisted, thickened with corn marks, the big toes turned inwards with an ugly bump. If I had been Mademoiselle Zizi I should have hidden them, and once again her stupidity gave me a pang, for beside her Joss's feet seemed to rest lightly under the white cross straps of her sandals, pretty slim feet, straight-toed, unblemished, the nails pearl pink.

Mademoiselle Zizi has also followed Eliot's eyes. When Joss thanks her for the lemon, she comments, 'I had not understood […] that any of you were … so big'. (The French 'grand' has the meaning of both 'big' and, as is probably intended here, 'grown up'.)

That night dinner is uncomfortable. Joss is unaware that her siblings had been accustomed to dining early. At this later hour, Paul refuses to serve the Grey children, and they must wait for the waitress to find the time. Once they finish their meal, Joss and Cecil are told they are wanted in the office:

‘Who gave you permission to change your time for dinner?’ an angry Zizi enquires. Cecil comments, ‘I was beginning to regret this childish helter-skelter week; it was partly regret that it was over, our happy obscurity was lost; Joss was dragging us into the limelight.’ Zizi goes on, ‘Your mother left you in my charge’. ‘She left us in Mr. Eliot’s,’ replies Joss. ‘Shall we ask him what he thinks?’ Zizi looks as if she is going to slap Joss, but only says ‘You may have your dinner with the guests […] but I forbid you, absolutely forbid you, to trouble Monsieur Eliot.’

Joss’s appearance in the dining room is the prelude to three days of excursions with Eliot. The next morning he is dressed in linen trousers, a dark-blue shirt, espadrilles and a cap, and is carrying dark glasses. His companion had expected him to be going to Paris, but he tells her, ‘I must see to my family, Zizi.’ First, he picks a bunch of roses and takes Joss and Cecil to the Hôtel-Dieu to see their mother. Cecil overhears him speaking to a nun in the corridor:

> He can talk to anyone in French or English, I thought with a pang. I listened to his easy voice and heard the agitation of pleasure in the little nun’s answers, and wondered if a woman could ever be like Eliot; and, if she could, could I be she? I was suddenly more grateful for my punishments at St Helena’s, and to Monsieur Armand and his newspaper lessons, and decided to stop being shy and practise my French on everyone from that day.

Eliot reassures Mrs Grey, then takes Joss and Cecil to the sweet and cake shop:

> ‘They don’t do boxes up like that in Southstone,’ said Joss.
> ‘In London they might,’ said Eliot.
> ‘This isn’t London. This is a little town, smaller than Southstone.’
> ‘The French understand living,’ said Eliot, and I longed to be French.
> Then he took us to the Giraffe.

Cecil notes that at the Giraffe café the waiter adds water to her glass of wine, while Joss’s glass is filled.

That day Eliot picnics with the Greys, and he then takes all five of them on an excursion to Soissons in his Rolls-Royce. Describing Soissons, Cecil mentions the ruined abbey and the cathedral that was rebuilt after being knocked down in the war. The climactic scene occurs before the statue of the Black Virgin in the Chapel of the Resurrection. On entering the cathedral

Cecil has covered her head with Eliot's handkerchief, while Joss is given a black lace veil. Joss is as beautiful as a painting as she holds up Vicky, her youngest sister, to admire the Black Virgin. Impressed by Joss's beauty, Eliot unconsciously grips Cecil's shoulders. The visit to the cathedral is followed by a stop at a pâtisserie that is even more elegant than the one in Vieux-Moutiers.

The Chapel of the Resurrection with the statue of the Black Virgin is found not in the Soissons cathedral, but 50 km away in the basilica of Liesse-Notre-Dame. It is unclear why the author collapsed the two churches.

The following day Eliot takes the children to the forest of Compiègne. They go to a village with a castle with turrets and walls 'like the Sleeping Beauty's' – perhaps the Château de Pierrefonds, famed for its restoration by Viollet-le-Duc. In the afternoon they picnic with a French family they meet, and that evening dine and drink rosé wine at a chalet restaurant called La Grenouille. The party return to Les OEillets late in the evening, and Mademoiselle Zizi is not pleased.

The third day starts badly because Eliot has found Paul in his room; he states that Paul must leave the hotel. Joss intervenes on Paul's behalf, and Eliot agrees to let Paul stay 'if you will come out with me again today'. The last destination is the champagne cellars in the nearby town of Dormans. Eliot tries to avoid bringing along the younger children, but they insist on coming as well.

'For us champagne will always have a ghost; it can never be a wine for feasts but one for mourning,' warns Godden's narrator Cecil. 'Because it made the first crack,' comments her sister Hester. For after visiting the cellars, Eliot and his 'fine family' are invited to taste the champagne. The members of a celebrated fishing club have just finished lunch: 'This year the guest of honour is what in your country you would call your Sherlock Holmes, one of the greatest detectives in France. If you wait a moment you will see him coming out, Inspector Jules Cailleux.'

On hearing the inspector's name, Eliot immediately picks up Vicky and holds her in front of his face. Pretexting an appointment in Rheims, in a cold and clipped voice he insists the children come away with him immediately. On the way back to Vieux-Moutiers, silence is unbroken until Eliot stops the car:

> 'I'm sorry I had to do that,' he said.
> 'Then why did you?' asked Joss.
> 'I had a reason,' said Eliot, 'that you would not understand.'

> ‘Then you can’t expect us to understand, can you?’ asked Joss. Her voice was cold but it trembled a little.
> ‘All right. I tell lies,’ said Eliot violently. It was the first time he had come up against a family opinion. ‘I tell lies, and so do you and you and you, all of you.’
> ‘For you to tell them is different,’ said Hester.
> ‘I didn’t ask to be a hero.’
> ‘They mean you are grown up,’ said Joss coldly.
> ‘I see,’ said Eliot. ‘You expect yourselves to be comfortably riddled with faults…’
> ‘We are.’
> ‘And you think you will lose them when you grow up.’
> ‘I hope so,’ I said firmly.
> ‘You poor little fools!’
> Joss put her hand on Eliot’s knee. ‘Eliot, what has made you so unhappy?’
> He looked down at her hand and I shall always remember his answer. ‘What has made you so unhappy?’ Joss asked, and he answered, ‘Being perfectly happy for two days.’

That evening at dinner Eliot buys champagne for the children’s table to compensate for the aborted visit to the cellars.

But things go wrong when Joss offers a glass to Mademoiselle Zizi, who responds by throwing the champagne back at her. Zizi and Eliot have a loud argument, and she begs him to send for the children’s uncle. He explains that he gave his word not to send for him, and besides, ‘I can’t have the uncle, an Englishman, here now.’

The adults leave the hotel for the evening; Madame Corbet turns off the electricity at the main. Joss threatens to return home, even without her passport, and suggests to Cecil that she must have been happier when she (Joss) was ill. It is more interesting now, Cecil replies:

> Think how alive we are. It isn’t like Southstone, where we just went on and on and nothing ever happened. Here I can feel us living. Don’t you feel as if you were being stretched?

‘It hurts to be stretched,’ replies her elder sister.

When Paul finishes work he, Joss and Cecil finish the champagne left in the glasses; then he steals the key to the wine cellar and returns with bottles of Blanc de blanc and Bouzy Rouge. Eventually Joss passes out, and just

then the adults return to the scene of what looks to them like an orgy. Paul blames everything on the two girls, and Madame Corbet slaps Cecil's cheeks. Monsieur Joubert, a guest who is a well-known painter, volunteers to pay for the wine, tells Eliot he has done enough, assures himself that Cecil can walk to her room and carries Joss to hers.

The next day Eliot goes to Paris and stays away from Les OEillets for three days. The painter arranges for Joss to spend a few days painting with him, and the four younger children return to their previous routine:

> […] [T]here was a new friendliness in the house. We had put Paul out of bounds so that we heard no scandal; Mademoiselle Zizi and Joss kept truce under Monsieur Joubert; Madame Corbet, perhaps because she wished she had not slapped me, was less sharp; and for us it was as if we had taken a step or two backwards; we were children again, and that was a relief.

Things come to a head, finally, on the day that the town's brass instrument factory is to hold what the children call the Brass Instruments Ball at the hotel. Godden recreates the menu that the chef has spent four days preparing:

> Hors-d'oeuvres variés
> Homard à la mayonnaise
> Poulet chasseur
> Filet de boeuf rôti jardinière
> Salade de saison
> Fromages variés
> Pièce Montée
> Fruits

Monsieur Joubert invites Joss to lunch that day, and the only other diners are Eliot and Mademoiselle Zizi. Eliot is once again visibly attracted to Joss, leading his companion to say she cannot have an older man and a young girl in her hotel. The painter excuses himself, calls a taxi and leaves the hotel. Joss is upset and goes to her room.

In the evening the children dress for the Ball, although they have not, strictly speaking, been invited. Will tells Cecil he has seen a man pushing a motorbike on to the *Marie France*, a barge anchored in the cove near the hotel, then pushing the bike off the barge and into the Marne. He has also seen another man dressed in Eliot's clothes. Overhearing this, Eliot in his

stern voice makes Will go upstairs, locks him in his room, and then brings him his dinner on a tray.

Meanwhile Joss, wearing a new dress she calls ‘Sin’, is the belle of the Brass Instruments Ball. The kitchen boy Paul has had too much to drink and is prevented from dancing with her. Eliot briefly takes his place, but shortly thereafter the party ends. At three in the morning Paul climbs up a ladder to look into Joss’s room. Cecil has taken her sister’s place in bed, and sees Paul fall from the ladder and then struggle with Eliot, who has a small case in hand; Cecil senses that he is about to go away. Paul lunges at the case, the two men fight, and Paul falls to the ground. Then, in the moonlight, Cecil glimpses what she thinks is Eliot’s sharp paperknife in his hand.

The next morning is ‘filled with absences’. Paul cannot be found for his early morning kitchen duties. Young Willmouse is fast asleep and cannot be awakened. Finally, Eliot too is nowhere to be found, although the local police commissioner has come to the hotel to look for him. Eliot is said to have gone to Paris, yet his Rolls-Royce is still parked in the drive.

On examining Will, the doctor realises the boy has been drugged. Cecil recalls that the night before her brother had been telling her about seeing the barge and the motorbike, when Eliot interrupted, locked Will in his room for no apparent reason, and then brought him something to eat and drink – laced with a sleeping draught, it now emerges.

The children notice the barge *Marie France* is no longer anchored in the cove, then go in the kitchen to get their goûter. Monsieur Armand is reading a newspaper report about a dramatic robbery in Paris, in which valuable diamonds have been carried away in an aluminium case. The police attribute the theft to ‘an experienced thief, perhaps the international bandit Allen’. Beneath the headline, ‘I have seen him and shall know him again’, Cecil sees a photograph of Inspector Jules Cailleux of the Sûreté Générale, who is investigating the case. Joss and Cecil realise Inspector Cailleux was the honoured guest at the champagne cellars at Dormans, whose presence caused Eliot to act strangely and immediately leave the scene. Eliot’s game is up.

AN INTERNATIONAL BANDIT

Just as Rumer Godden modified the names and descriptions of her family members and of the hotel owner, Violet Grierson, in writing *The Greengage Summer*, she surely also modified the description of its protagonist. The thief's name was neither 'Mr Martin', as in her memoir, nor 'Eliot' as in the novel.

However, newspaper references to the thief as 'the international bandit Allen' cited repeatedly in the novel's last pages provide a clue to his identity. In August 1923, French newspapers, as well as a few British and American ones, recorded the arrest of a thief who initially gave his name as 'Maurice William Allon'. One brief account headed 'A former British officer committed thefts in trains' claims that the thief resided in Boulogne-sur-Mer, 'in the same house where a postal employee was assassinated last year with scissors by an unknown criminal'. (This article or a similar one, if Godden saw them, may have inspired the troubling scene in *The Greengage Summer* in which Eliot apparently kills the kitchen boy Paul.)

Beneath the headline, 'A "train rat" and his mistress arrested in Calais', the newspaper *L'Avenir* gave the thief's correct name and provided a fuller account of his arrest:

> A 'train rat' specialising in baggage theft was apprehended in the Calais train station by two inspectors from the Sûreté Générale in Paris.
>
> This individual is none other than Arnold Ruskin Treacher, born 25 December 1895 in London, a specialist in the theft of hand baggage who is also sought for non-compliance with a deportation order.
>
> Arrested and brought to the office of the said train station, this international evildoer declared his name was Maurice William Allon, born 15 December 1891 in Tunbridge Wells.
>
> On being searched, he was found to have an English passport. The righthand pocket of his vest contained an envelope, a yellow metal dice, and a brooch of yellow metal and blue enamel, a pair of yellow metal cufflinks marked M.M., a signet ring marked B., a rosace necklace of yellow metal and red stones on a chain of yellow metal, an insignia of

blue enamel and yellow metal with the numbers 1924 and marked Wellesley, a brooch of yellow metal and six gold scraps.

In another pocket of the vest, a second envelope contained a necklace of white metal with the insignia ‘Royal Army Medical Corps’, an insignia ‘The Oxfordshire Buckinghamshire Light Infantry’, the insignia of an English officer, a brooch of white metal ‘Issued by Dept. of Defence, Returned from Active Service’.

A third envelope in the right pocket of his trousers contained: a pendant of white metal with a blue stone of imitation opal, a pendant of white metal with a white stone, a pendant of yellow metal with a pink stone, a woman’s ring of yellow metal that was missing a stone, a white metal photograph holder containing a white metal chain.

Two pens, one marked ‘The Moore Co’ with a yellow metal attachment, the other marked ‘Waterman Ideal’, a mechanical pencil of white metal, and blue leather match holder, a small pair of scissors, a pair of gloves, two handkerchiefs marked G., two pocketknives, one with a mother of pearl handle, the other with a black handle, and the sum of 85 centimes.

Taken to Boulogne, due to the urgent searches that could be done there, Treacher admitted having come to Calais to get rid of the jewels he was carrying and to commit further misdemeanours. To that end he had brought with him a large empty suitcase.

Assisted by the special commissioner of the Boulogne train station and in the presence of Treacher and his companion, Eugénie Henriette Manesse, a search was conducted in the couple’s hotel room which led to the discovery of three suitcases, as well as of numerous objects recognised as having been stolen.

Another suitcase that Treacher had stolen was seized at the left luggage office of the Amiens train station. A fifth one, consigned to the left luggage office of the Saint-Quentin train station, and whose ticket was found at his domicile, was also taken. Finally, he had to admit having thrown a sixth one into the harbour of Boulogne, after having emptied it out.

The mistress of this ‘train rat’, Mademoiselle Manesse, was also arrested, accused of complicity in receiving stolen objects.

Arnold Ruskin Treacher

Early in *The Greengage Summer*, Eliot states he has been a soldier, so it is perhaps unsurprising to learn that the 'train rat' was a former officer who remained in France after the war, and then used his familiarity with the region to commit thefts there.

More unexpectedly, British records also show that, like both Rumer Godden and Violet Grierson, Arnold Ruskin Treacher had an Anglo-Indian family background; curiously one that may have particularly attracted him to

‘champagne country’. Arnold was the third of four sons of Walter George Treacher, born in Bombay in 1851, and the former Ada Elizabeth Marshall, the daughter of a London wine merchant. His paternal grandfather, John Treacher, was an East India merchant: a chemist and druggist who sold medicine and made soda water. His was the only soda water manufactory in Bombay in the 1850s, where, at that time ‘Treacher’s’ was a household name. John Treacher’s son, Walter George, was listed as a soap manufacturer when he married Alice Mary Marshall in 1875; the 1881 census describes Treacher as an accountant; and an 1889 guide to Bombay lists him as the manager of Cutler, Palmer and Co., ‘the wine merchants of India’.

Walter Treacher and his first wife had no children and after her death in Bombay in 1891, he married Ada Elizabeth, her younger sister, in Paris. The births of their sons Walter Alwyn, Donald Roy and Arnold Ruskin were registered in Surrey (1893) and Kent (1895 and 1897), while the fourth, Kenneth Noel, was born in India in 1901.

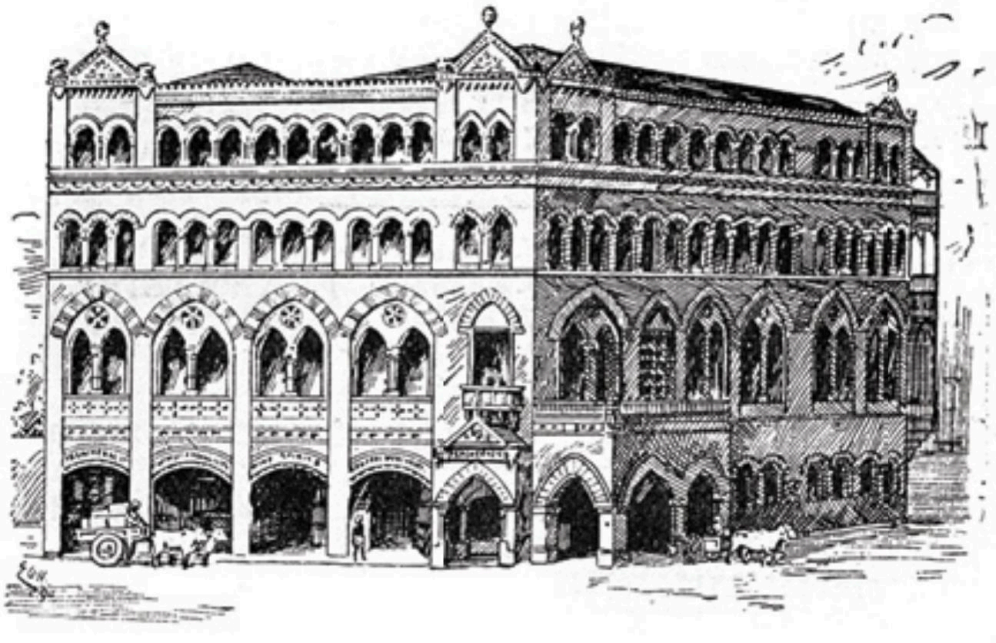
In the spring of 1897, W.G. Treacher travelled to America to visit the Ruskin colony recently established in Tennessee. Local newspapers covered his visit; one quotes him explaining the purpose of his trip as follows:

> I came over here to look into and write up this colony for the English press, and I want to say that I was very much struck by the energy and skill employed in exposition of the claims that Ruskin should have upon the minds of all who deplore the evils of competition run mad in our present so-called civilization.

In 1899, a lengthy extract from one of Walter Treacher’s letters appears in a newspaper article headed ‘Ruskin, Tenn., A Co-operative Colony which has thrived’.

The journalist describes Walter G. Treacher of Bombay as having travelled the world over, ‘especially through such countries as Afghanistan, Africa, India and the like, studying the problems of living’. In one paragraph Treacher mentions ‘the glorious vine’: ‘Ruskin does not favour bars and saloons, and yet it does not say that the glorious vine is to be treated as a noxious plant, it looks forward to the time when a light wine will be served at discretion at mealtime.’ Treacher returned to England over a year later, and it appears that his wife and three sons had been in America with him. For on 30 August 1898 – a month after his own departure from New York – there is a record of Ada Treacher and her young sons Walter, Donald and Arnold sailing from New York to Liverpool on board the SS *Cymric*. It

seems likely that Arnold Ruskin Treacher's middle name was chosen in honour of Tennessee's Ruskin colony.



Treacher & Co., Bombay, chemist and druggist

In 1901, Arnold's older brothers were at College House school in Essex; Arnold himself may have been living with his parents in Bombay. In the same year their fourth son was born there. From 1906 the Treacher family relocated from Bombay and England to Auckland, New Zealand. In a letter to the editor of the Australian *Daily Telegraph* headed 'Why not make Australia a comfortable country?', Treacher senior returns to the topics of both socialism and the virtues of wine, and refers to his recent arrival in Oceania:

> An eminent Frenchman – a socialist – wrote that 'alcohol was not necessary,' but that 'it made life more comfortable'. As a new arrival in this country, I am struck with the fact how 'uncomfortable' the meals are – tea, tea, tea, at every meal. Why a good wholesome 'Vin Ordinaire' should not be introduced, and effective, sustained assistance rendered by the State in the furthering of the interests of the grape industry and winemaking, appears to me a strange thing. I am one of the first who introduced the Australian wine to Europeans in India, and am convinced that the wine is excellent, and that this country can be made a wine-producing and wine-consuming one like France. Why men and women should continue (away from the back-blocks) to drink tea

with their meals is a riddle. Life, I contend, would be more enjoyable with good wine, cheap, and tea dyspeptics would abound.

Wine-drinking countries are not the countries where drunkenness is abnormal – certainly the pleasantest countries to travel in are those of the European continent, where wine is plentiful and cheap, where tea is never drunk with meals, and scarcely a drunkard to be seen.

The seeming absurdity of Australians confining themselves to the drinking of tea, while their country can grow splendid grapes cheaply and their vineyardists can, and do, turn out excellent wines (greatly used by the Bordeaux wine merchants to blend with their wines), is to a non-Australian only to be comprehended by the fact that custom is often with the masses greater than written law. It appears to me that a strong man is needed to voice the claim of the Australian grape in this sunny clime, and to direct the attention of thousands to the obtaining [of] a life far away from such overcrowded shopkeeping cities like Sydney.

Hoping my few remarks may be read by some of your influential men, and lead to some greater consideration of the question than it has apparently received. – Yours, etc. Walter G. Treacher. Matchin's Hotel, Bombay, India

Treacher died in Bangalore in 1910.

At the time of Walter Treacher's death, his four sons were of roughly the same ages as the four Godden daughters were during 'the greengage summer'. The fact that he lost his father at a young age may partially explain Arnold's kindness to the four Anglo-Indian girls – temporarily 'orphaned' of not one but two parents – whose path crossed his at the Hôtel des Violettes.

ARNOLD RUSKIN TREACHER, AKA WALTER ALWYN ROSS

In 1911, Arnold and his brother Donald spent a year at Skinners' School in Tunbridge Wells. They then returned to New Zealand, and at the outbreak of war the two eldest Treacher sons joined the New Zealand Expeditionary Forces. Arnold – the third Treacher son – travelled from Auckland to Sydney, Australia to enlist in the Australian army in June 1915, when the minimum age was changed from nineteen to eighteen. Inspired perhaps by his late father's newspaper articles, he described himself as a journalist. Donald Treacher was killed at Gallipoli a few weeks before his brother enlisted.

According to the statutory declaration he made to a Justice of the Peace in Sydney in 1962, Arnold Treacher joined the 20th Battalion of the Australian Infantry Forces and saw active service in Egypt, Gallipoli, France and Belgium. He was once mentioned in dispatches and wounded twice, at Bois-Grenier (near Armentières) and at Pozières (northeast of Amiens). He was discharged from the army in 1919.

In a letter applying for discharge in England, Treacher explained that he had no dependants in Australia; his next of kin was his brother in New Zealand who was in no way dependent on him. He adds that before the war his domicile had been in India, England and New Zealand, and he had spent only short periods in Australia. The reason for his application was that in England he was engaged to a woman whose mother was a dependent invalid. When Australian authorities attempted to send Treacher the bronze oak leaf emblems he had earned for his service, the package was returned to them from two different addresses, once from Paris and once from the Royal Automobile Club, Pall Mall.

In 1929, six years after the events portrayed in *The Greengage Summer*, Treacher's name was on the voter registration list in Brighton, and in 1931 he married twenty-year-old Gwendoline Violet Fuller there. According to the 1939 register, however, Gwendoline V. Treacher was a widow residing with her parents; she later remarried.

There is no reference to this marriage in the declaration Treacher made in Sydney. He explains:

> In the year 1920 I changed my name to Walter Alwyn Ross since which time I have always been known by that name and I have for some years been engaged in the business of an Estate Agency with my wife trading under the name Ross & Ross at 32 Allfield Road, Woy Woy.

Arnold Ruskin Treacher chose a striking pseudonym: he borrowed the first name and middle name of his oldest brother, who died in New Zealand in 1953. By adopting the surname 'Ross', Treacher – consciously or unconsciously – gave himself the initials W.A.R.

The wife to whom Walter Alwyn Ross refers here is Edith May Murray, whom he married in Hampstead in 1934. A brief item published in the *Western Daily Press* in January 1937 is headed 'Man Arrested at Newport. Alleged Theft From His Father-in-Law':

> Arrested on Friday at Newport (Monmouthshire), Walter Alwyn Ross (40), described as a canvasser, of no fixed home, was remanded at Hampstead on Saturday charged with stealing on October 17 from a house in Rosslyn Hill, Hampstead, 33 £1 notes, a gold watch and chain, three gold rings, a lady's watch and a Jubilee 5s piece, valued together at £75, the property of Mr William Murray, his father-in-law, a civil engineer.
>
> Detective-Sergeant Ernest Bottoms said that he saw Ross detained at Newport County police station, and told him that he would be charged with stealing the property referred to from his father-in-law's house.
>
> He replied, 'I don't know what you are talking about.' Later he said, 'My name is Ross.'

The 1939 register shows Walter and Edith Ross in Richmond upon Thames; his occupation is dairy product dealer.

The Rosses' whereabouts during the Second World War are unknown. By 1949 they had relocated to Woy Woy, New South Wales, Australia. That year the name Walter Alwyn Ross appears in a Sydney newspaper as one of many victims of a 'Mean Con-Man [Who] Got Soldiers' Deferred Pay'. Voter registration lists describe Walter's occupation as shopkeeper and, later, estate agent. Ross's reason for contacting the Repatriation Department in 1962 and

explaining his name change was that 'I am at present a very sick man and wish to submit an application for a pension […]. For this I need my discharge from the services.' He died in Woy Woy later that year.

Returning briefly to Rumer Godden's writings about the summer of 1923, in her novel Eliot escapes in the barge *Marie France* that the children had seen anchored in the cove. A few days later, Mrs Grey's brother arrives from Southstone to take charge of the situation; an anonymous telegram – sent from Châlons-sur-Marne (now Châlons-en-Champagne) – has alerted him to his sister's illness. Eliot has presumably escaped both the police and Château-Thierry by travelling on the *Marie France* to Châlons-sur-Marne, from where he telegraphed Uncle William, and then on to Germany.

Uncle William's after-the-fact comments on Eliot pepper Cecil's narrative and would seem to apply to Treacher's situation. Uncle William questions whether Eliot's medals were really his. He also wonders about the thief's choice of hotel:

> 'It seems so unsuitable.' Then he answered himself, as he often did, 'But was it? Comfortable, unostentatious, enough foreigners to make him inconspicuous, midway between Paris and the border, and a silly woman who would do anything for him.'

Eliot's car 'was a Rolls-Royce, old, a little battered, but its blue and silver length always looked handsome among the French and American cars. "Why choose one that stood out?" Uncle William asked […]. "Unless he wanted to stand out."'

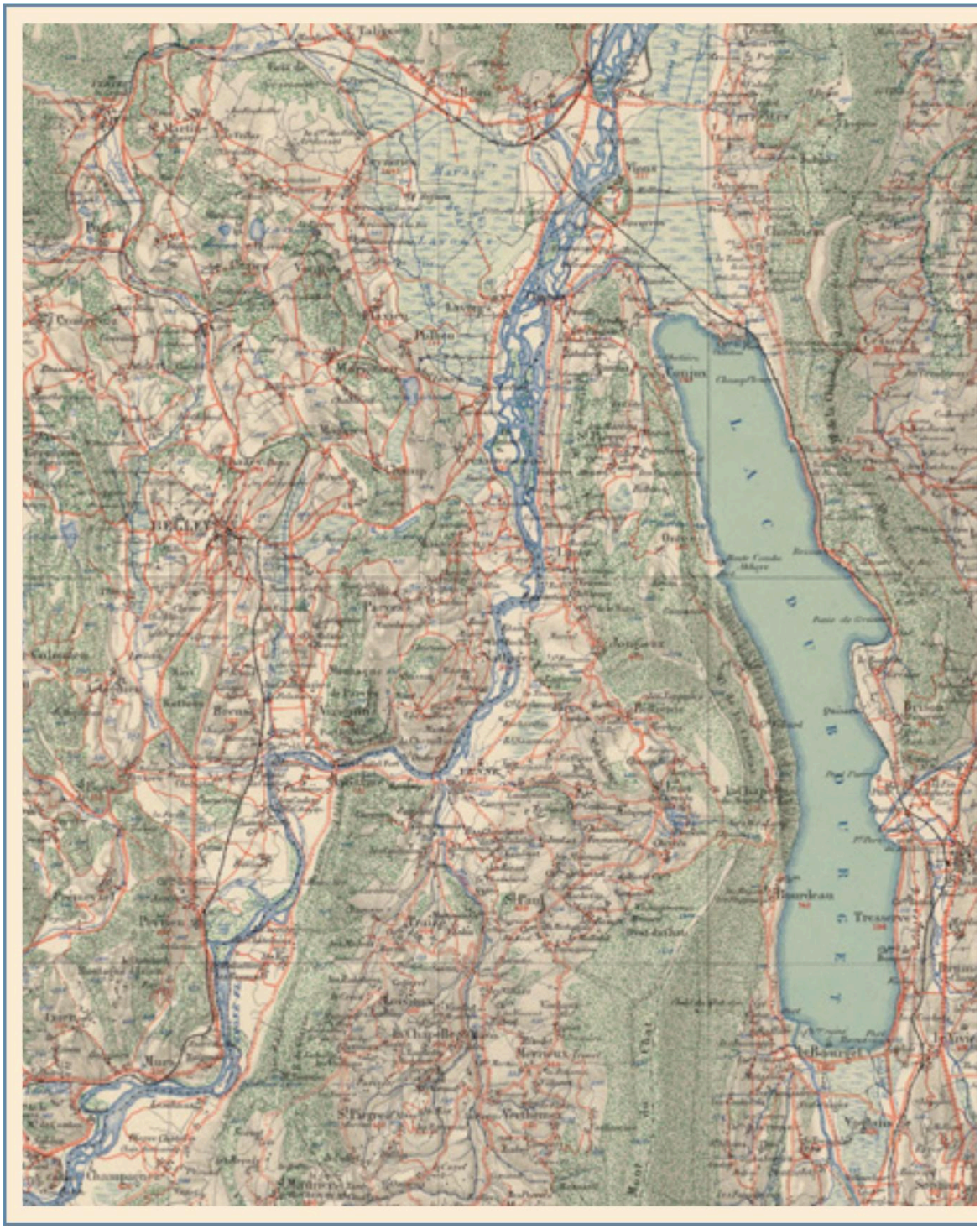
In Rumer's memoir, on the other hand, 'Mr Martin', his accomplice 'Mrs Martin' and the child whom they claim to be their daughter have simply disappeared when the inspector comes looking for them the morning after a fête at the hotel. There is no mention of either a murder or an escape by barge. 'Mme Chenal,' the hotelkeeper, weeps: 'He was such a gentleman. He left money for their bill.'

In another difference from the novel, it is not the kitchen boy Paul but Madame Chenal's companion, a French Canadian called Jean-Pierre, who is attracted to Rumer's elder sister: 'He used to get a ladder and climb up to our window as we undressed for bed.' Madame Chenal first learns about this the morning of the thief's disappearance, and she immediately informs Mrs Godden. Although the children's mother is still only barely able to travel, the hotelkeeper asks the family to leave.

The memoir includes a brief sequel to the Goddens' stay in Château-Thierry. During the thief's last week at the Hôtel des Violettes, as he was

leaving for ‘work’, the handle of his attaché case had come off and Jon Godden had lent him hers: a small case of crocodile leather, made from the skin of a crocodile her father had shot. Three months after the dramatic events of the greengage summer, the case was sent back to the Goddens in Eastbourne: from somewhere in the South of France.

The sequel confirms the reader’s sense that thief and, in his later life, bigamist though he was, Treacher returned at least as much as he borrowed from the Goddens.



THE LAC DU BOURGET AND SURROUNDINGS

JULY 1936

HOLIDAY AFFAIRS

> [A] girl named Margery Sharp has written a novel coming out soon […] called The Nutmeg Tree and it is laid in Belley and there is lots about the Pernollet and the Landscape and Aix[-les-Bains] […]. Do you know this lady? O yes, she has plenty to say about Brillat-Savarin.
>
> – CARL VAN VECHTEN TO GERTRUDE STEIN, 1 AUGUST 1937

> The sight of her daughter roused Julia, as always, to heartfelt admiration; but it occurred to her as strange that she and Sir William, having been summoned all across France to Les Sapins solely by the question of Susan's marriage, should have found there something of so much greater interest.
>
> – MARGERY SHARP, *THE NUTMEG TREE*

Margery Sharp was born in Salisbury, Wiltshire in January 1905, the youngest of John Henry and Clara Ellen Sharp's three daughters. When she was eight months old her father, a civil servant, was transferred from the audit office in Salisbury to Malta, where she was baptised Clara Margery Melita. The Sharps lived in Malta for nine years, and Margery began school there. According to the third-person account she gave to a newspaper, 'Thoroughly warmed, she [then] returned to England to find the weather almost unaltered, and spent most of her time at Streatham Hill high school edging her desk nearer the fire.'

Before going on to university Margery worked for a year as a shorthand typist. Then at Bedford College, University of London, she 'took part in every dramatic performance going', began publishing in *Punch* and other places, and obtained a degree in French, 'just because she liked going to France'. Margery also spent a year studying painting at the Westminster Art School.

After graduation, Margery and two other 'shingled students', as the *Guardian* described them, were selected by the National Union of University Students to form a debating team. Over a period of several months, they held twenty-five debates with university students in the United States. Margery

explained that ‘Most of the subjects will be on democratic government,’ adding that ‘The other two [women] are first-class straight speakers, and audiences always want somebody to follow and be a little funny afterwards. That is my job.’

On one occasion the British debaters defended the affirmation ‘That the centralization of government destroys the political sense of a people.’ Margery suggested that politics is ‘in France a comic opera and in England a church bazaar’. None of the four books under consideration here are political in the conventional sense, and *The Greengage Tree*, *The Scapegoat* and *The Snow-Woman* are not primarily comic novels, but the opposition between an opera and a church bazaar has some relevance to all four novels’ accounts of French holidays.

In addition to *The Nutmeg Tree*, a few of Sharp’s early stories are also set in France. Two stories published in the 1930s explore the ambiguities of English versus French national identity. Sharp’s gift for comedy is much in evidence in the first story, set in Paris, while the second takes place in ‘a remote village in the department of Ain’ adjacent to the ‘Muzin’ (now Musin) of *The Nutmeg Tree*.

‘RISK’

As the story opens, four Englishmen have just finished a game of bridge. A doctor and another man are veterans of the Battle of Jutland, a third man is a policeman, and the ‘odd fourth’ is Henry Cotterill, who writes books on medieval art. Their conversation turns to the subject of the biggest risk one has taken, bar wartime. Cotterill submits that he was guillotined (i.e. humiliated) in Paris – by someone who reminded him of the Vicar’s Daughter.

After a year knocking about America, Henry is delighted to return to England but detours via Paris, intending to make some money writing a popular handbook. His plan is to take a look at the Louvre and spend a few nights at the second-rate Grand Hôtel Humide. He enjoys watching people in the lounge – the sheep and the goats: ‘the goats that year were all much of a muchness, but in the sheep the Vicar’s Daughter won hands down’.

Henry first notices the Vicar’s Daughter at the Louvre, with a catalogue in one hand and a pencil in the other. She strikes Henry then, ‘even amongst all the Easter excursion schoolmarms’. Later in the lounge of the Humide, ‘she stood out like – like a bar of brown Windsor in a film star’s bathroom’.

Recalling the depiction of the Grey children in *The Greengage Summer*, dressed in their school uniforms, the Vicar’s Daughter is wearing a nice sensible raincoat with a Girl Guide clover leaf pinned on the lapel, a sort of old Etonian tie around her neck, and a little tweed cap. Henry declares: ‘It made me homesick to look at her, I thought of Vicarage garden parties and croquet on the lawn; I even thought of Lower School chapel, and the Head’s confirmation classes.’

He asks the Vicar’s Daughter the way to Notre Dame, and notices that her guidebook is inscribed ‘Mary’: it contains a postcard of Leonardo’s *Holy Family* and a ticket for a performance of Molière’s *Précieuses Ridicules*. This leads to a conversation about the instruction of French in lower forms and, as it happens, Mary ‘had just been appointed junior French mistress at a gilt-edged girls’ boarding school on the South Coast’.

Term starts in two days, and Mary is in Paris to polish her ‘already immaculate accent’:

> The rest of her life story took about five minutes. There wasn't much to tell, of course: she had once reached the semi-final of the county tennis championships, and once been knocked over on her bicycle, otherwise the highlight of her existence was this remarkably superior job which she had so deservedly snaffled. […] I felt as morally braced by our brief conversation as though I'd spent a week in Devonshire.

That evening Mary will be in the audience of *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, while Henry goes to several racy venues, such as the *Lune Rousse*.

Returning late at night to his room in the hotel's English quarter, Henry finds Mary in the corridor and in her dressing-gown. When she went back to her room after the theatre, she discovered a dead man there. Henry suggests he will alert the manager, who will send the police. But Mary anticipates that a police investigation would cause publicity and delay her return to England. 'If only I could change rooms,' she wails. Thinking of the brilliant post that awaits Mary in England in only two days, Henry reflects that 'a girl of that sort doesn't often marry, and what else was there for her to look forward to?'

This thought decides Henry to take the risk. He reasons that although Mary would inevitably be found innocent of killing the man found in her hotel room, an arrest and a trial would stain her character and she would lose her job. For Henry, on the other hand, 'it didn't matter a damn'. He reflects, 'No one asks for an author's moral character before reading his views on Cranach, and the date I got back to England was no one's business.' As registered guests at the hotel, Henry and Mary cannot exchange rooms, but they can change the scene of the crime. Mary accepts Henry's kind offer, and after helping him move the dead man to his room, she returns to her own.

The next morning, once Mary has left the hotel, Henry rings for his breakfast. When the valet de chambre sees the body, Henry is arrested – and spends a month in the hands of the French police. He ends his story with the remark that the situation would have put the policeman's hair on end.

My hair is on end, the policeman, who has been listening to the story, replies: 'If the French hadn't happened to lay [Mary] by the heels a week ago, Cotterill would have placed me in a very awkward position.' Finally, the policeman reveals that although Mary's mother was indeed English, Mary herself was French 'by birth and by marriage'.

Until their falling out, she and the dead man had specialised in confidence tricks and the innocent abroad.

‘STILL WATERS’

A short story published in the *Strand Magazine* tells a happier story of the discovery by Montague Sherrard – an Englishman on holiday in France – of the circumstances that led to the marriage of Jacques and Lise Dulac, a devoted, now-elderly couple.

Sherrard figures in several of Margery Sharp’s short stories, and in ‘Still Waters’ his exhausting success at the Bar has led his doctor to order him to the resort of Aix-les-Bains. On arrival, however, Sherrard detests the hotel and its many English guests. On his second morning there he hires a car, tells the chauffeur to drive wherever he likes, and falls asleep. When he awakens the car has stopped in a small hamlet in the department of Ain.

The Englishman tells the chauffeur he would like to stay somewhere in the village. In the absence of a hotel or even a post office, he asks to be taken to the curé. A small villa that stands alone has attracted his eye, and the curé introduces him to the elderly couple who live there. Monsieur and Madame Dulac, who do not speak English, are ‘a most attractive and sympathetic pair’.

The Dulacs agree to let Sherrard stay with them, and after a few days he is struck by a watercolour landscape in the salon. He recognises the subject of the painting:

> He was looking at the famous view of the Thames from Richmond Hill. There could be no mistake. Weak in design, over-detailed, the work nevertheless achieved a high degree of likeness; it was the typical product of a young lady with a gift for art […].

Beneath the date ‘1890’, the painting is signed ‘E.P.’; Sherrard suggests to his hostess that she may have received it from an English friend. But Madame Dulac states that she and her husband know no English people and insists Sherrard is mistaken. The next time Sherrard goes into the salon, the painting is gone; he imagines various explanations for its disappearance.

Twelve hours later Sherrard accidentally finds, hidden beneath an old wardrobe, a Bond Street diary for the year 1891 that is inscribed with the

name Elizabeth Pomfret. In the diary a young woman complains of being far from home, in a strange country and having sold her pearls to allow her companion 'J.' to buy a vineyard. He connects the E.P. on the painting with Elizabeth Pomfret and the J. in the diary with Monsieur Jacques. Again Sherrard's legal brain comes up with various theories.

After a few days, Sherrard opens the diary on his desk and begins writing a letter to a London investigator to seek information concerning Miss Elizabeth Pomfret. Just then Madame Dulac enters his room, sees the half-written letter and the open diary, and admonishes him in fluent English. 'How *dare* you!', she says, followed by phrases Sherrard remembers having heard in his childhood, such as 'No act of a gentleman' and 'Meddling with what doesn't concern you'. Despite her sudden fluency in English, Madame Dulac continues to insist she is French, leading Sherrard to finally see the light: 'There – there are more ways of becoming French than by birth, madame. By marriage, for example…'

Seeking 'not acquittal, but appreciation', Lise Dulac finally tells Sherrard her story:

> When I was young, in the 'eighties, […] girls were very wild; and I was one of the worst. I had a stepmother, you see, and three half-sisters, and of course I didn't get on with them; and after my father died I became quite unmanageable. I was *fast*.
>
> […] I once took a hansom, all alone, *after dark*, and drove round and round the Inner Circle [in Regent's Park]…. I flirted shockingly, and then wondered why no one wanted to marry me. By the time I was twenty-five I simply lived for excitement; and I really believe that was why I eloped. Jacques was my drawing-master, and very handsome, and very much in love with me; he saw nothing of my bad qualities, even now he won't admit they ever existed; he actually still likes me to talk English to him sometimes, because he says it reminds him of those first days!

The very wild, unmanageable, *fast* Elizabeth Pomfret of the 1880s has become the placid, elderly Lise Dulac.

The fact that the artist's initials in the corner of a watercolour launch Montgomery Sherrard's quest to discover the artist's story might induce the reader to take notice of his initials: M.S. Linking the curious barrister to the author, they seem to hint that the hidden story behind the Dulacs' happy marriage has some form of relevance to Sharp's own life.

FOUR GARDENS

The novel that immediately precedes *The Nutmeg Tree* is set in England rather than France, but it anticipates the later novel in its contrast of the romantic choices of three generations of women. Not one of the three becomes French, to borrow Sherrard's expression, but the youngest woman is slightly more adventurous than her mother and grandmother. The novel also includes what appears to be a humorous cameo of the author's future husband.

The mother of the main character, Caroline Chase, is a grocer's daughter who becomes engaged to a gentleman's son in 1879. But her fiancé's father calls off the engagement, and she marries an estate agent's clerk instead.

Mr Chase dies not long after the marriage and Caroline is raised by her mother. As a girl she has a guilty secret about which she never speaks, concerning an abandoned estate called Richmond Lodge:

> The house itself appeared to her grand, melancholy, and imposing; but the garden – the green and shaggy wilderness, half-glimpsed over a gate or wall – had the allurements of Eden. Like Eve after the Fall, she hovered longingly without; but where Eve had only memories, Caroline had imagination. There had been an old sale bill, now rotted away, which spoke of waterworks and pavilions; there had been a Scottish head gardener, who, before departing to an earl's had dropped a word on orchid houses. Orchids and crystal falls – China pagodas ten stories high – with such and suchlike did Caroline, for five or six years, happily decorate her imaginary landscape; but as fairy tales lost their charm, so did the waterfalls. She began to hanker after the real, after the material Richmond Lodge rather than an imaginary pagoda: and thus found the criminal act of trespass come readily into her mind.

The pavilion and pagoda imagery recurs in Sharp's description of a French garden in *The Nutmeg Tree*: the heroine Julia discovers the pavilion and decorates it with a lipstick heart.

When she is seventeen, Caroline contemplates trespassing on the estate but one day finds that the garden gate has been left open by Vincent, a nephew of Mrs Macbeth, the local Louis XIV. Caroline and Vincent begin meeting regularly at Richmond Lodge. He wants to be a critic and teaches her about Ruskin, and they even kiss. But their secret meetings end abruptly on the day that, after leaving the garden, they encounter Caroline's mother and her friends, who invite Vincent to the Chapel Bazaar. Vincent does not attend, and Caroline never sees him again.

Immediately after the bazaar, however, Caroline meets Henry Smith. Although she is not 'unduly in love' with Henry, a manager at the local boot factory, Caroline eventually marries him, and they go on to have a son and a daughter. The narrator comments that 'In [their daughter] Lily the instinct for female subordination, if it existed at all, was considerably weaker than in her mother and grandmother.'

During the war the boot factory prospers, and Henry buys it from his employer. The Smiths move to Friar's Green, 'a charmingly rural part of Kingston', and become part of the New Rich. Caroline fervently hopes twenty-three-year-old Lily, who likes to be called Lal, will marry a gentleman. On her way to visit her friend Lady Tregarthan at Tregarthan Court one day, Caroline notices a man drinking beer at the Three Feathers:

> He was unusually tall, unusually broad, and wore some dark-coloured shirt open at the neck. The rest of his costume consisted of flannel trousers, an old tweed coat, and a pair of outlandish-looking white shoes with rope soles. These Caroline had a good opportunity of observing, since they were cocked up on a table almost under her nose. They reminded her of a pair Lal had brought home from France; they were laced in just the same way, with white tape crossing over the bare foot; for the man wore no socks. 'A foreigner?' wondered Caroline. But what was a foreigner doing at Friar's Green? And in spite of his outlandishness, he did not look like a foreigner. A hiker, then? The rare hikers encountered about Bushey Park did not look like that. They were usually neat and genteel, the girls coquettish in coloured headbands, the men spruce with brilliantine; this man was slovenly, almost dirty, and his hair needed cutting…
>
> The most curious of all was that Caroline, even after a third and final glance, could not be sure whether he was a gentleman, or whether he wasn't.

Gilbert Chalmers is an artist and a vegetarian, Caroline learns from Lady Tregarthan, who describes him as having ‘no money, no manners, and no morals’ – only the ‘physique of a navvy with the brains of a guinea-pig’.

Lady Tregarthan’s daughter, Lady Westcott, has convinced the vicar to let Mr Chalmers ‘cover the walls of the Sunday-school room with Anglo-Saxon saints’. Chalmers’ artistic and social activities cause a stir in the village:

> He was at once popular and unpopular, both in a very high degree. By the rowdy set at the Three Feathers, by the silk-stockinged damsels who worked in Kingston, he was described as a caution, a cough-drop, and a proper oner. By the nice people like the Misses Brodrick, he was described as a scandal, a disgrace, and a menace to decent society. The tales of his doings were endless. He had been seen bathing stark in the river. He had been seen sun-bathing, practically stark, in the Jacksons’ garden. He invited others to join him. He said that modesty was an invention of the devil, patented by the Anglican Church, and told the elder Miss Brodrick that he considered mixed nudist camps an excellent thing.
>
> He told the Vicar that Buddhism was the only possible religion for a decent man.
>
> He told Mr Raymond, the R.A., that art began with Braque.
>
> He told two Rover Scouts that the British Empire was the greatest force for hypocrisy the world had ever seen.
>
> He told Lady Tregarthan that it was no use trying to converse with a woman unless you had slept with her first.

Caroline initially believes her daughter will have little interest in such a man. But she soon discovers that Lal’s ‘reverence for modern art’ has been leading her to visit the Sunday-school room at least once a day, and then to take lessons with the artist (in ‘Still Waters’ art lessons lead to marriage).

Lady Tregarthan informs Caroline that not only has Mr Chalmers had an affair with her parlourmaid, but he is in fact already married. Caroline confronts her daughter, who tells her that she is aware of this fact, and that she loves Chalmers. After working up the courage to go and see Mr Chalmers, Caroline perceives that he ‘was that most destructive of all male types: the drifter’. He agrees to write to his wife to see if she has changed her mind about divorce, and suggests that until then, ‘I don’t think it’s much good our talking.’

As she rises to go, Caroline stands face to face with her adversary for a moment:

> ‘Wondering what they see in me?’ asks Mr Chalmers.
>
> ‘Yes,’ said Caroline; and at that moment – just for one instant – she did see it. She saw him as something huge, untamed, like those creatures half-horse, half-man, that Ancient Greeks used to carve in stone. The image was gone almost before she could seize it; but she had, for that instant, felt the desire to know, challenge, and master something strange, powerful, and ruthless.

Fortunately for Caroline, Lal begins to lose interest in Chalmers when he suggests that either she or another young woman accompany him to South America.

In the end Chalmers abandons his painting and leaves the village. Conforming to the pattern of her mother and grandmother, Lal renounces her interest in Chalmers and marries the more conventional Jeremy Baker: ‘He would never set the Thames on fire, but he was good and hard-working, and devoted to Lal […].’

Within a few years of writing *Four Gardens*, Margery Sharp married Geoffrey Castle, a recently divorced man with the same initials as Gilbert Chalmers. The introduction of the comic figure Gilbert Chalmers into a section of *Four Gardens* as the temporary love interest of Lal, the most adventurous woman in her family, suggests that at the time Sharp wrote it, she knew Geoffrey Castle well enough to publish a humorous caricature of him. What she may not have known then was whether Geoffrey’s first wife would divorce him, or whether he and she would eventually marry.

Caroline Chase’s imaginary landscape – the Edenic garden of Richmond Lodge – fades out of sight on the day that Vincent fails to attend the church bazaar, and she meets her future husband Henry instead. *The Nutmeg Tree* transplants Caroline’s Edenic garden from England to France: the nut grove suggested by the title is where the widower Sir William Waring, who has ‘knocked about a bit’, proposes marriage to the heroine Julia – despite her ‘peculiarly incorrect past’.

THE NUTMEG TREE

The novel's opening sentence conveys two key pieces of information about the heroine – her complex marital situation and her allegiance to France: 'Julia, by marriage Mrs Packett, by courtesy Mrs Macdermot, lay in her bath singing the Marseillaise.' As a semi-retired performer, Julia has a natural affinity with the comic opera over the church bazaar.

In a flashback we learn that after an acquaintance of only a few days, Sylvester Packett, a first lieutenant in the Gunners, married Julia during a forty-eight-hour leave, wrote a will in favour of the son he expected her to have, and was killed two months later at Ypres. In the event Julia gives birth to a girl, not a boy, and names her 'Suzanne'; Sylvester's parents in Suffolk essentially adopt their granddaughter and anglicise her name. As a child Susan attends school at Wycombe Abbey, has riding lessons and her great friend is the daughter of a lord.

Susan Packett is now twenty and a student at Girton: her summer plan is to polish her French by reading Molière. She is, in short, a sort of 'Vicar's Daughter', or as Julia puts it, a prig. Since leaving her daughter to be raised by the Packetts, Julia has lived in London, for a time with a Mr Macdermot who is separated from his wife, has worked as a chorus girl and has managed a theatre. Susan has invited her mother to join her and her grandmother at the Villa des Sapins: their summer rental in Muzin near Belley.

The reason for the invitation is that Susan has recently met a man she wants to marry, and her grandmother thinks she is too young. In *Four Gardens* Lal was somewhat more adventurous than her mother and grandmother. The comedy of *The Nutmeg Tree* derives in large part from Sharp's inversion of this familiar trope. Predating a similar premise in the comedy series *Absolutely Fabulous* by half a century, the heroine Julia is the adventurous one, while her rather priggish daughter is a throwback to her paternal grandmother. 'Not an objectionable prig, not a proselytizing prig, but a prig from very excess of good qualities,' the narrator specifies.

If Julia's voice is less robust than usual as she sings the *Marseillaise* in the bath in London, it is because she is hiding in the bathroom with her best pieces of furniture to keep them safe from the brokers to whom she owes £5.

She solves the problem by sending the brokers to an antique dealer she knows who will take the furniture, pay the bailiffs and give her the money for a ticket to France.

Musin, the road to the villa

In preparation for her stay with the Packetts, Julia thinks, 'I've got to look like a lady […]. I've got to *be* a lady':

> In the end Julia decided to take single instead of return tickets, and to buy a new dinner dress with the money saved. She also purchased a linen suit, a Matron's Model hat, and three pairs of camiknickers. She had indeed plenty of these already, but with policemen embroidered on the legs. And on the platform at Victoria, for almost the first time in her life, she bought a book.
>
> It was *The Forsyte Saga* […].

Julia has little time for reading on the boat, for she meets an acrobat called Fred and his troupe: The Six Flying Genocchios. They travel to Paris together and, before boarding her sleeper train at the Gare de Lyon, Julia stands in for one of the troupe in a musical hall performance. Afterwards, in a taxi to the train station, she feels obliged to decline Fred's proposal of marriage because her daughter is expecting her.

Disembarking from the train at Ambérieu, Julia is greeted by a chauffeur who will deliver her to the Villa des Sapins. Once there she is shown to her room,

Musin, the (probable) Villa des Sapins

> And now, surely, as she lay triumphant in that French bath, was the moment for the Marseillaise. But not a note issued from Julia's throat. She was a little tired after her travelling, and a little sentimental still over Fred; but the chief reason for her silence was that she hadn't yet, so to speak, been introduced. She felt odd enough herself, lying stark naked in a house where she hadn't even met her hostess; how would Susan feel, if after such careful plans for their first meeting her mother prematurely announced her presence by a song from the bath?

The reunion with Susan is anticlimactic, Julia feels, and when she comes across Susan's fiancé, Bryan, in the garden, she takes him for the gardener and speaks to him in French; without disabusing her of the notion, he gives her 'practically a glad-eye'. Old Mrs Packett is friendly but obsessed with the Kensington cake shop she imagines Julia will want to set up, using Packett family money (she is unaware that her daughter-in-law has already spent the sum on producing plays).

Julia, Susan and Bryan sit down to a delicious lunch, but Julia begins to suspect Bryan 'is the same sort as I am! […] Now what the hell am I to do?'

Later that afternoon Julia learns from her daughter that Bryan and she met only about six weeks ago on a train. A week later he turned up in Muzin. Julia can well imagine the situation: not only from her recent encounter with the acrobat, for she had also met Mr Macdermot, with whom she lived for several years, on a train. Bryan is a barrister, Susan explains, who has not yet settled down to work. However, Old Mrs Packett happens to know his father Sir James, and she arranges for Bryan to stay in the lodge in the vines near their villa. Julia realises she knows Sir James too: from the time he passed out in a crowded lounge at the Frivolity. 'All that family, thought Julia – perhaps unfairly – were born pursuers.'

Susan asks her mother to have a talk with Bryan and Julia agrees:

> It was plain that the day had already been mapped out for her – for her, and for everyone else in the Villa des Sapins. Bryan awaited his cue in the vine, Mrs Packett lunched alone in the billiard-room, exactly as Susan bade them. Only Susan herself seemed to have freedom of movement; and she now used it to bring the most important of her puppets from the wings and plant him firmly in the centre of the stage.
>
> 'Enter Juvenile Lead,' thought Julia, as she watched Bryan come down the staircase alone. Her own rôle being merely that of confidante, she sacrificed elegance to comfort and put her feet up on the low wall.

Confronting Bryan, Julia learns he had in fact come to France to meet another young woman; it was when that did not work out that he met Susan on the train. He admits he was 'at a loose end' but assures Julia he is not 'just after a holiday affair'. Tired of being merely a confidante, Julia informs Bryan that 'This house – and the people in it – aren't conducive to holiday affairs. I just wanted to know how you got here at all.' Bryan gets the unspoken last word: '"If it comes to that," said his look, "how the hell did *you*?"'

On the second day of Julia's visit, Old Mrs Packett proposes to take her guests to lunch in nearby Belley:

> The Pernollet, as becomes a restaurant with a monument to Brillat-Savarin not a stone's throw from its door, is a very good restaurant indeed. It is better, in its kind, than the cathedral, or the close, or the old gateway, so that Julia had some excuse for preferring it to all three. The hour spent looking at architecture with Susan had not been exactly tedious, but it had been very long, and for the last quarter of it Julia was

troubled by her feet. In a way this was lucky, for in order to rest them she had voluntarily sat for ten solid minutes before a stained-glass window, thus surprising and pleasing her daughter very much indeed.

Belley, monument to Brillat-Savarin

The lawyer and epicure Brillat-Savarin (1755–1826), author of *The Physiology of Taste*, is Belley's favourite son. In Sharp's time the monument to Brillat-Savarin was located on the *promenoir* across the street from the Pernollet hotel and restaurant, which earned three Michelin stars in 1933.

As the extract from Carl Van Vechten's letter to Gertrude Stein cited as epigraph above implies, the Pernollet was also frequented by Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas. Between 1924 and 1944 they lived in rented accommodations in Belley or nearby, when they were not in Paris. Sharp may have heard about Belley and the Pernollet from her *Punch* colleague E.V. Lucas. An extract about the Pernollet from Lucas's article 'Two Feasts' is appended to this chapter.

One afternoon Julia goes up to the terrace above the house to read *The Forsyte Saga*. Bryan follows her and gets her to admit that the two of them are in fact the same kind:

> […] [W]e're sort of half-and-halves. So long as we stay with our own lot, we're all right. We don't do any harm. It's only when we begin to mix with the others – with the real good – that trouble starts. If you married Susan, you'd make her miserable.

Julia is convinced that Susan and Bryan are unsuited and feels depressed; only the news that her daughter's guardian, Sir William Waring, is coming to join them makes a slight rift. Bryan impertinently mentions Sir William is fifty-one, and a widower since his wife's death ten years ago.

The next day after lunch Julia determines to walk up to the second terrace above the house to contemplate a plum tree. Passing through a little grove of nut trees she glimpses the dilapidated shell of a tiny pavilion:

> Its roof peaked up like the roof of a pagoda: a stray architect, long before the Packetts came, had identified it as late eighteenth-century chinoiserie. But Julia's interest was purely human; what a place, she thought, for assignations! Did Susan ever meet Bryan there, when the house slept and a moon shone through the nut trees? But the bushes about the steps grew thick and undisturbed; Julia very much feared that the pavilion was being wasted. Poor thing, it would probably be quite glad of someone – glad to hear a kiss again, to be filled with delicious stifled laughter and the murmuring of lover's vows…

After nearly a quarter of an hour in the sun, Julia returns to the house: 'She was feeling extremely pleased with herself; but pride, notoriously, goes before a fall.'

The fall comes quickly because Julia finds Susan and Bryan contemplating an extremely vulgar postcard addressed to 'Mrs Packard'. The card was sent by Fred Genocchio, and Julia is obliged to admit it is intended for her. She sends a reply, leaving her with only FF5. Hearing that there is a casino in Aix-les-Bains, she determines to get there somehow, confident that she will be able to improve her financial situation.

Julia recalls that outside the Pernollet restaurant, she had noticed a string of waiting cars whose owners came from Aix. She starts out on foot:

> The road to Belley covered nearly four miles [in reality, four kilometres], and the day was hot; but Julia – a yellow bow round her neck, her hat over one eye – did not care a damn. She felt extraordinarily light-hearted. She had a smile for everyone she met, and nearly caused the death of two bicycling *poilus* [war veterans] who kept turning round to wave to her. Julia waved back. She waved also to the car which had so narrowly missed them. Soon, very softly, she was singing as she walked.
>
> She sang the Marseillaise.
>
> She had reverted to type.

Outside the Pernollet Julia finds a Daimler with a chauffeur and two middle-aged English spinsters – the Marlowe sisters – about to return to Aix. She invents a story about having left her three children with their governess in Aix and, after confirming that the Marlowes are unfamiliar with Yorkshire, regales them with some 'lost-sheep-and-heather' stories as well.

Meanwhile, the party at Les Sapins take tea without Julia. Bryan is reading *Mademoiselle Dax jeune fille* by Claude Farrère, a 1907 novel advocating *l'union libre*, while Susan continues with Molière. Susan is vaguely aware of a general relaxing in the moral atmosphere.

At the casino in Aix-les-Bains Julia loses her FF5 in five minutes and, suffering from heat and thirst, spots a large, superior café. Sitting down on the terrace she finds an Englishman who buys her a drink. She invents a story of being abandoned by her companion, gets the Englishman to offer her some cash, leads him to a lingerie store, then disappears out of the back door and returns by taxi to the Villa des Sapins.

The next morning Julia finds her way to the ruined pavilion and, using her lipstick, adorns it with a heart. Just then Sir William arrives at the villa, and on the following day he joins her in a walk to the pavilion. Among the nut trees Julia begins reciting: 'I had a little nut-tree/ And nothing would it bear/ But a silver nutmeg'; Sir William completes the verse: 'And a golden pear'. Julia reveals that her mother used to play Columbine, and the Clown taught her the nursery rhyme. To Susan, Julia feels, she could never admit that her mother had been a Columbine; but Sir William is entirely sympathetic. The scene and the novel's title have at least one admittedly autobiographical element, for when asked to explain the title, Sharp told an interviewer that it comes from an old nursery rhyme that her grandmother, 'a Sheffield lady', told her in the old days.

Julia's blossoming friendship with Sir William makes it increasingly difficult for her to play the role of 'Young Mrs Packett'. Lunching together at the Pernollet, they cross the Misses Marlowe, and Julia amuses her companion by confessing to the lies she told them about her three young children, as well as her 'lost-sheep-and-heather' stories. 'For the first time since her arrival in Muzin she was completely herself; she had cast all care aside, she no longer bothered even about being a lady.'

Julia begs William not to tell the others: 'But why not?', he enquires. 'Because – because they think I'm a lady!' Julia replies. 'And so you are', Sir William gallantly assures her. The two of them begin having morning tête-à-têtes in the garden, to the extent that Bryan facetiously asks Susan what the French is for 'love nest'.

Learning that Sir William is planning to resign from his last committee, Julia recognises that Susan – currently occupied only by her study of French literature and having a lover – is feeling under-exercised and would be perfectly suited to committee work. Susan jumps at the chance to participate, and Julia contrives, even from a distance, to arouse her daughter's interest in the 'fierce, rather dishevelled young man who [according to Sir William] was the prime mover' of the committee. Susan, who has done settlement work for school, has already heard of him: 'The Bellamy who wrote *Civics of the Slums*?'

Susan's business-like activity stirs her grandmother to more actively promote her own plan of having Julia open a cake shop called The Singing Samovar. Julia has no intention of ever doing this, but Mrs Packett goes so far as to contact estate agents in Kensington, and to answer advertisements in *The Lady* for 'partners with capital'. She enlists Sir William into looking into the balance sheets of potential partners, and ropes Bryan into drawing up articles of partnership. The two Packetts clearly have 'the moral ascendency'. Meanwhile, Julia, Sir William and Bryan 'had instinctively grouped themselves into a passively resisting minority'.

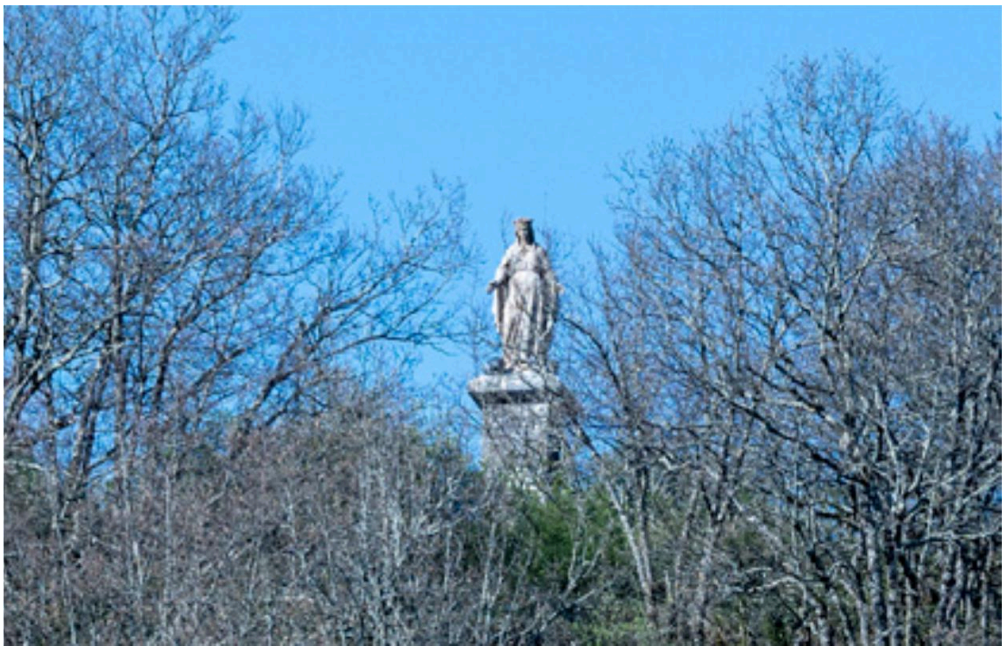
Susan continues her French studies, of course, 'but the moment they were done she switched straight over' to her plans for a 'self-governing and educational' club in the East End. When Bryan seems uninterested, Susan distracts him by suggesting they walk to the statue of the Virgin on the heights above the neighbouring village.

Sir William confirms to Julia that Mr Bellamy is unmarried, about thirty, and highly good-looking 'In a hungry sort of way I suppose […]. Rather like a Victorian curate gone Communist. I believe his father was on Oxford don.' Julia has apparently succeeded in providing her daughter not only with an occupation but also with a potential love interest, whom she feels would suit Susan much better than Bryan.

Julia initially refuses Sir William's marriage proposal: she adores him but feels that 'To marry Sir William would be to destroy the last argument against Susan's marriage with Bryan.' She later accepts, but wonders: 'Shall I have to open bazaars?' Sir William replies 'Good heavens, no!'

Bryan disgraces himself first by kissing a village woman he describes as 'a cowherd's daughter' – only Julia is aware of this – and then by coming into dinner drunk after a local wedding: 'For several days afterwards Sir William, whenever he walked through the village, was constantly being surprised by the strains of "Forty Years On".' Bryan promises Susan not to drink wine again so long as they are in France. The next evening at dinner, however, he is dismayed to find the wine carafe only half-full.

The half-full carafe leads Bryan ‘to view more seriously Susan’s philanthropic activities’. He admits to Julia that although trained as a barrister, he sees himself more as a journalist, a special correspondent. In this case he will not earn much money, whereas Susan, Julia explains, will inherit from the Packetts. Bryan suggests Susan will give it away to good works and Julia confirms: ‘It’s what I’ve been telling you all along.’



Magnieu, statue of the Virgin

Returning from a dinner in Aix, Julia says goodnight to Sir William, then goes outside to fetch her scarf. She is waylaid by Bryan, accusing her of hypocrisy for seizing her chance with Sir William while insisting that Bryan must not marry Susan. ‘You’re not my sort at all,’ Julia tells him. ‘You’re bad.’ That night she packs her bag and determines to hitchhike to Paris. When Sir William discovers she has gone, he goes after her. Back at the villa, Bryan tells Susan, ‘I’ve had a cable. I’ve got to go home to-night.’

Avoiding the Misses Marlowe in their Daimler, a mutually absorbed couple, a large family party and a speeding car, Julia finally accepts a ride from a very young man in a disreputable, two-seater Citroën. He turns off the Paris road at Auxerre to buy her tea, although he is running out of funds to get himself to Paris. At Auxerre’s Café de la République, he mentions to Julia that their highly picturesque surroundings had been admired by Walter Pater. ‘Something in his voice made Julia look, not at the roof-line, but at him; and for the first time she realized that he was extremely worried.’ He suggests taking her to the British Consul, but Julia argues, ‘I’ll look more

distressed by myself. Distressed British Subject – that's my line now.' She persuades the driver to go on alone.

Meanwhile, Sir William catches up with the Misses Marlowe, who had glimpsed Julia in the spluttering Citroën outside of Bourg[-en-Bresse].

> 'Where were they going?' Miss Marlowe wonders:
> 'Auxerre?' suggested Miss Ann. 'If your wife is fond of Pater –'
> In spite of fatigue and anxiety, Sir William smiled: he made a mental note that he must one day give Julia *Marius*, and see what happened …

He doubles back to Auxerre, and finds Julia at an empty table 'with her elbows among the crockery and her head on her fists':

> 'My dear Julia!' he said. 'What on earth will you do next?'

MARGERY SHARP AND GEOFFREY CASTLE

Unlike *The Greengage Summer*, *The Scapegoat* and *The Snow-Woman*, *The Nutmeg Tree* features third-person as opposed to first-person narration. There is no full-length biography of the author, although the recent Dean Street Press editions of some of Sharp's novels have a biographical introduction.

And yet, because both *The Nutmeg Tree*, which came out in September 1937, and 'Still Waters', published in March 1938, are set in the immediate vicinity of Belley and the Pernollet restaurant, it is tempting to connect these writings with the author's holiday in France in the summer of 1936. On 20 August, Margery Sharp and a friend, Helen Katherine Leathem, a librarian from Cambridge, sailed from Southampton to Villefranche-sur-Mer (near Nice), returning by the same route on 16 September.

Did they go first to Aix-les-Bains, as Montague Sharp does, and then relocate to the Belley area? Did one or the other have a friend or acquaintance who had rented a villa for the summer? Did Geoffrey Castle, whom Margery had known since at least the period in which she wrote *Four Gardens*, join Margery and her friend there, as Sir William Waring joins the Packett party? If the not-yet-divorced Geoffrey Castle inspired the comically distorted caricature Gilbert Chalmers in *Four Gardens*, perhaps the Geoffrey Castle who was now soon to divorce in order to marry again inspired the romantically idealised widower Sir William Waring in *The Nutmeg Tree*.

If little has been written about Margery Sharp's life, even less information is available about her husband's. Under the name Jeffery [sic] Lloyd Castle, he published two science fiction novels in the 1950s, as well as a short story in the *Cornhill Magazine*, which describes him as 'a writer and student by inclination, engineer by profession, soldier by hazard'.

Castle was born in Surrey in 1898. He was a solider in the First World War, and the 1921 census lists him with his regiment as a lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery. In 1924, he was named as a co-respondent in the divorce suit of Christopher George Ling, a major in the Royal Engineers, and the former Frances Mary Mitchell, born in Kashmir to British parents. The Lings were the parents of two children. The decree nisi was granted in

October 1924 and on 14 November Frances Ling boarded a ship called the SS *China* en route to Bombay.

On the same day Geoffrey Castle, described as a journalist, headed to New York aboard the SS *Cleveland*. Records show his destination was Porterville, California, where large tracts of 'fine fruit land' were being offered to former soldiers of the British army wishing to make a home there. Mr Castle's immigration form provides a brief description: 5 feet 10 ½ inches tall, brown hair, hazel eyes, a split upper lip and a cut eye.

Both parties returned to England and on 30 April 1925 Geoffrey Lloyd Castle, now a fruit farmer, married Frances Mary Ling (formerly Mitchell), at the Chelsea Register Office. Later that year they travelled to America together, listing Porterville as their destination. In 1928, Frances spent four months in England, and then went back to their residence in Strathmore, California. In May 1929, a brief item in the *Los Angeles Times* noted that G.L. Castle of Strathmore was completing a two-place monoplane that he would be testing soon.

Sometime after this Geoffrey and his wife relocated to England, and in November 1937 Frances, residing in their home in Esher, Surrey, petitioned for divorce. Geoffrey is described as an engineer in the employment of Hawkers Aircraft Limited, who is living with Margery Sharp at 25 Craven Road, Paddington. The decree nisi was pronounced in mid-April 1938, and the author's name appeared in a few English papers.

Margery Sharp was in New York at the time. She had travelled there in early February 1938 to work on the American production of a play based on *The Nutmeg Tree*. Press coverage of Geoffrey Castle's divorce was almost certainly another factor in the timing of her departure from London. On the other side of the Atlantic Sharp was not yet well known and the divorce was not covered. What catches the researcher's eye instead, in the American press of April 1938, is a full-page interview with the author. It appeared in several papers under the headline 'Should Girls Be Sheltered?'

The journalist's premise is that there are two kinds of women: adventurous and sheltered. She asks 'which type makes the best marriage? Are men attracted by the "get-around-the-world" or by the "stay-at-home" girl?' Since *The Nutmeg Tree* represents the two distinct types – in its adventurous heroine Julia on the one hand, and her sheltered daughter Susan on the other – the journalist asks the author Margery Sharp for the answers.

Sharp confesses that she likes the adventurous type of woman:

THE SUN, BALTIMORE, SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 27, 1938

Humorous Novelist (English) Weds Englishman

NEW YORK—Margery Sharp, English writer, whose novel, the "Nutmeg Tree," will be produced next month on Broadway, and Geoffrey Lloyd Castle, English airplane manufacturer, in New York just after they were married. The couple left immediately for Washington.

PRESSES GERMANY ON AUSTRIAN LOAN

U. S. Replies To Recent Note Which Sought To Repudiate Obligation

Wilson To Be Consulted On Ways Of Forcing Action By Reich Government

By J. FRED ESSARY

(Continued from Page 1)

bonds are plainly out of luck, since there is no way of collecting anything direct from Austria, and Germany has agreed to pay nothing.

In this connection the State Department restates this Government's attitude toward defaulted bond issues floated in the United States, and held by private interests. It says:

"It is not its practice in such situations to conduct adjustment negotiations with foreign debtors for American bondholders or other private creditors. It uses its good offices when it appropriately can to promote and facilitate such negotiations between the creditors and the debtors. It most seriously protests and objects to acts or policies of foreign governments which discriminate against American creditors and give other foreign creditors more favorable treatment than Americans."

Ambassador Wilson, with whom debt and other issues between the United States and Germany will be taken up, arrived here today and was closeted for hours with Sumner Welles, Acting Secretary of State.

It was after M. Wilson's departure for Warm Springs, Ga., to report to the President, that the department released copies of its two notes to Germany, and one from Germany.

Czech President To Be Named We

Dr. Emil Hacha, Ha... preme Court Admin... Will Be Chos...

Prague, Czechoslovakia, ... Parliament will meet nex... to cast ballots for Dr. ... head of the Supreme Co... tration, to be Czechoslo... President.

The 66-year-old jurist ... by the nation's leading ... ties to succeed Eduard ... resigned the Presidency ... sion of Sudetenland to G...

Wheeled Ladder In Flight Fro...

Two Arizona Convicts ... As Three Seek Wa... Fugitives Cau...

Florence, Ariz., Nov. ... convicts, using a cleverly ... ladder, scaled State Prison ... under gunfire of guards w... ed two prisoners. Two of ... one of them wounded, wer... in the Gila river bottoms ... later.

The ladder, as high as ...

black ma...

IT'S

Wedding photograph of Geoffrey Castle and Margery Sharp

Perhaps you'd like to know how I met Julia? I mean the type who inspired me to write about this kind of audacious, man-loving, unconventional sort of woman. I first saw her on a bus, and I loved her the minute I saw her.

I noticed her as she came aboard. She looked swiftly over the passengers below. There was not a man among them. So, with the merriest of nods to the conductor, she marched calmly up the stairs. I followed, because I sensed that this was going to be worth watching. Sure enough, she found a seat beside a man. She did it all with such good nature, too, such bonhomie. I was enchanted.

I never saw her again, but she lingered in my mind. I couldn't forget her. I wondered what sort of acquaintanceship she struck up with the man in the bus, or perhaps with a man in the next bus in which she rode, for that sort of woman doesn't lead a dull, man-less existence. Oh, no. Finally I built her up into a novel after collecting, for two years, all sorts of additional episodes that might be in line with her character.

The novelist began to frequent a pub patronised by theatre people, just to hear their stories.

Sharp tells her interviewer that she also appreciates sheltered girls who emerge from college with a reforming spirit, but warns that

> […] [S]o often this kind of girl does not learn as she gets older. That type of intelligence – the reformer type – does not develop. They seem to reach their maximum mental growth at about 25, and from then on they are at a standstill.
>
> But men seeking wives are not too critical of their girl friends, even though they are cut on this pattern. The men themselves are too young to discriminate, to see the possible prig and the nagger behind the lovely exterior.

Sharp's conclusion appears to contain an indirect allusion to her own situation:

> A man usually marries a girl younger than himself, and she does not keep pace with him, does not develop mentally. That is why the second marriage is likely happier than his first. One I know of is a radiant success.

Might the recently divorced man Margery Sharp was about to marry have been in the back of her mind? Six months after his divorce was pronounced, Geoffrey Lloyd Castle also travelled to New York, where he and Margery were married in November 1938.

E.V. LUCAS ON THE PERNOLLET RESTAURANT

Here follows an extract on Belley and the Pernollet restaurant from E.V. Lucas's article 'Two Feasts'.

> Hastily passing over the circumstance that the town where Brillat-Savarin was born is named Belley, I should like to say something about the food to be eaten there too; for in many wanderings about the fair land of France, not exactly in search of delicacies but very willingly coming upon good kitchens, I have never found more respect paid to good cooking than at the famous restaurant known as Pernollet's, at lunch time an honoured place of pilgrimage by visitors to Chambéry and Aix-les-Bains – in fact, I am not sure that the proximity of Pernollet's to Aix-les-Bains does not draw more people thither than the *régime* of the waters. Whether Pernollet arranged his undeviating menu and framed his severe code of rules because the Master's memorial is just outside the hotel, or whether he would always and anywhere have chosen and cooked his aliments so well, I cannot say. But there it is. If you go to Belley (where, by a strange coincidence, of which the less said the better, Brillat-Savarin was born), you have to eat at Pernollet's, and if you eat at Pernollet's you find dishes in the manner of Brillat-Savarin and are under suspicion if you ask for pepper.
>
> Here is one of the menus put before every visitor:
>
> Ballotine de Canard truffée en gelée
> Croûtes aux queues d'écrevisses
> Champignons à la crème
> Pintaudon rôti sur canapé
> Écrevisses cardinalisées
> Dessert

No potatoes, no green vegetables, and no 'ou' [or]: you are expected to eat all. Two wines of the country it is customary at Belley to drink with this

formidable meal: both excellent, both white: Virieu and Marétel. But let no one in this part of France neglect the delicate and fragrant vintage of Seyssel.

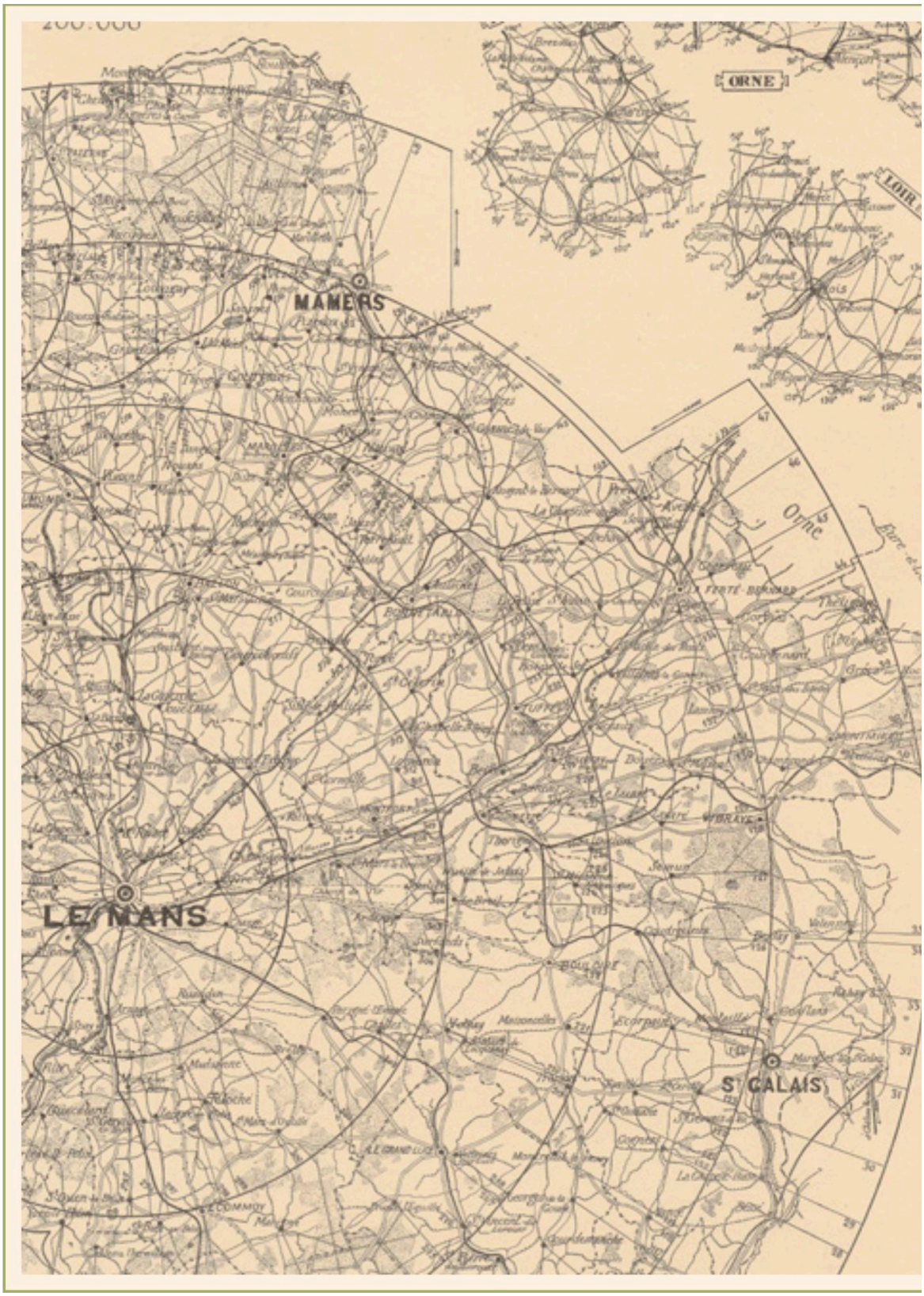
Belley, the Pernollet hotel and restaurant

It is chiefly for the crayfish, who dominates every table of renown from Lyon to Evian, from Grenoble to Bourg, that the Belley pilgrimage is made. All the restaurateurs of Savoie and Haute Savoie handle him with skill – there is a famous chef named Bise at Talloires, on the lake of Annecy, who sets its tail on a crust as well as any – but Pernollet's has the highest reputation. Whether it is sound to serve the crayfish twice in one meal I am not gourmet enough to pronounce. To my mind, when boiled and turned into a prince of the Church of Rome, it surrenders, in proportion to the pains to which it puts the eater, absurdly little; but that others do not share this view there is evidence brimming over.

Whatever one may feel about Brillat-Savarin's infatuation for cream, it is satisfactory to realise that he is a prophet in his own country. At Belley you may visit his house, a noble building; you may buy picture-postcards of him, in one of which he is actually at work – quill pen in hand and within reach of refreshment, solid and liquid – on his *Physiologie du Goût*, copies of which are in the bookshops; and you may lay a wreath at the foot of his monument in the little public park, where in marble he gazes at the landscape of mountains and vineyards, speculating on their yield of partridges and wine,

while three attendant children in bronze brandish the symbols of the feast: fish and fruit and game. Belley also honours Lamartine with a statue, his association with the place being his sojourn for four years as a youth with the Pères de Foi here. But what was Lamartine? A mere poet, a politician and historian: not the deviser of dishes. Brillat-Savarin, although his name now brings to mind only thoughts of eating, was in his spare time between meals a lawyer and the author of many legal works: he was also Belley's mayor. But the oddest phase of his career was, at the time of the Revolution, his sojourn in America to escape proscription, when he was reduced to playing the fiddle – and by no means the first fiddle – in a New York orchestra. It was there probably that he vowed that if ever he could eat again he would eat too richly.

Belley itself has not any overwhelming interest, but its bowling club provided me – as bowling clubs always do – with some agreeable entertainment. The greens, which are not greens at all in the impeccable English sense, but rather casual stretches of earth beaten down into a poor semblance of flatness, are just beside the Brillat-Savarin monument, and here as evening approaches and the time arrives to take things easy, the enthusiasts of Belley gather together, each with iron spheres inlaid with brass and bearing his own initials, and engage in friendly strife. The ordinary bowling is not unlike that of England, with its anxious curvature of spine, but when the captain, taking a heavier ball, tosses it into the air to fall upon and displace the proximate foe, a new series of movements and gestures come in. Our sedate and level English greens show nothing to compare with the swaying sidesteps and prances that accompany this critical coup. Another difference between English bowls and the bowls at Belley is that what we call the jack, is there – not I hope with any satirical suggestion – the cochon.



EASTERN SARTHE

OCTOBER 1955

TRADING PLACES

To show my middle-aged state, I am looking forward to this trip as eagerly as I have ever done any of my trips, because of finding out the soil of my forebears, and to tread upon their ground; whereas once upon a time, I should have needed a menace [a romantic interest] to have given the whole holiday a zip!

– DAPHNE DU MAURIER TO ORIEL MALET, 24 AUGUST 1955

Years of study, years of training, the fluency with which I spoke their language, taught their history, described their culture, had never brought me closer to [the French] themselves. I was too diffident, too conscious of my own reserve. My knowledge was library knowledge, and my day-by-day experience no deeper than a tourist's gleanings.

– DAPHNE DU MAURIER, *THE SCAPEGOAT*

Rumer Godden, before her first visit to France, had had at best a few years of French lessons at her various schools, and memorised some French poems as punishments. Before publishing her début novel, Margery Sharp had often been to France and read French at college. Daphne Du Maurier was one-eighth French. Her father, the actor and theatre director Gerald Du Maurier, had spent childhood holidays in Paris and Normandy, and his daughters Angela, Daphne and Jeanne had French lessons.

Several family holidays were also spent in France. Daphne wrote of her love for France, especially Paris, in her memoir *Myself When Young* (1977). In 1920, Gerald and his daughters were pictured in Dieppe with the actress Gladys Cooper and her son: Daphne's favourite people at the time. After being knighted in 1922, Gerald took his family to Algiers via Paris, and then on to Southern France. Daphne remembered that Christmas 1923 was spent 'at Monte Carlo followed by Cannes':

> Interest in the adult world about me gathered momentum. Golf, tennis tournaments – the Wimbledon stars were there in force, and we got to know them – dancing in the evening, gala dinners, a 'crush' on an older

man who was [her father's] contemporary; I even had my bitten nails manicured for the first time in my life.

Gerald Du Maurier and daughters, Gladys Cooper and son in Dieppe

In July 1924 the Du Mauriers were at Le Touquet in Normandy.

The three Du Maurier sisters were educated at home for the most part and had a relatively sheltered upbringing in Hampstead. When Daphne's elder sister, Angela, went to finishing school in Paris, she was 'moderately happy, though homesick'. In 1925, Daphne and a friend were sent instead to Miss Wicksteed's school in Meudon outside Paris; she rose to the challenge of her new environment:

> [T]he novelty of being plunged into the atmosphere of boarding-school, the set routine of classes, frequent excursions into Paris by train, new faces, new sights, and the delicious sense of humour of my childhood companion Doodie [Millar] […] made the experience one of intense excitement, increasingly so as the weeks progressed.

The increasing excitement was provided by Fernande Yvon, the *directrice* of the boarding-school: 'thirty-ish, slanting green eyes, and a manner that seemed a blend of sarcasm and veiled amusement'.

According to Daphne,

> Like most Frenchwomen, Fernande was a great *raconteuse*, and once launched upon a theme scarcely drew breath – her stories richly embellished with touches of her own (which I took for gospel truth), interposed, here and there, with an ironic shrug of the shoulder. Her own past sounded, to my eager ears, highly dramatic. A fiancé Marcel, killed in the war, leaving her heartbroken. A cousin in Normandy who wished to marry her, but for whom she felt no passion in return. A close friend, a film-star on the French screen, killed instantly in a motor-crash, the shock of hearing this profound. Fathers of ex-pupils who had made certain suggestions to her, their wives absent. A banker in Paris, always willing to assist financially, if …

Daphne spent three terms at the school and became very close to Fernande, accompanying her on a holiday in the spa town of La Bourboule in the Massif Central.

The following year Fernande started her own *maison d'éducation*, called *Les Chimères*, in Boulogne-sur-Seine. Daphne joined Fernande on another holiday in Trébeurden in Brittany and often visited her in Boulogne, a convenient stopping point on the way back to Hampstead after visiting Berlin with the actress Viola Tree or after skiing in Switzerland with novelist Edgar Wallace and family. When Daphne's parents bought a holiday home in Cornwall, she began to feel between two worlds, as she titled the relevant chapter of her memoir. She remembered thinking, 'If my mind and soul live in Fowey, […] perhaps I leave my heart behind in Paris.'

In 1929, *Les Chimères* was transferred from Boulogne to Neuilly and its directress took a suffix: publicity now described her as Mlle Fernande Yvon des Landelles. Daphne convinced Fernande to spend a week in Barbizon; the highlight for Daphne was finding Katherine Mansfield's grave in Fontainebleau. Another holiday was spent in Quimper in Brittany. Gradually, Cornwall, writing and then marriage and family took precedence over Fernande, but Daphne always maintained contact with her former teacher, and many years later sent her elder daughter, Tessa, to perfect her French with Fernande.

In a letter to her writer friend Oriel Malet, Daphne recalled that 'I used to go almost mad with grief at leaving in the old days, when Ferdie [Fernande] had her lovely house at Neuilly; and the awful dreariness of going back to Hampstead, and the shilling [worthless] routes [routines] of one's home, and the feeling of disapproval.'

TOWARDS *THE SCAPEGOAT*

After her father's death Daphne wrote and published two family histories – *Gerald: A Portrait* (1934) and *The Du Mauriers* (1937) – that both touch briefly on her French ancestry. At the time she wrote *The Du Mauriers* she had the use of some family letters, but little possibility for further research, since she and her husband were living in Egypt.

Sometime after the Second World War, Gerald Du Maurier's belongings were sent to Daphne in Cornwall: they included a desk that had once belonged to Gerald's father, George. In the desk Daphne discovered two handwritten letters in French relating the story of her émigré ancestor Robert Busson – later Robert Busson Du Maurier – a master glassblower. The letters had been written after the émigré's death by his sister Sophie, for the benefit of her brother's English descendants. Several events and proper names found in Sophie's account would be reflected in *The Scapegoat*, in which Daphne imagines the existence of a contemporary French aristocratic family who own a glass foundry.

Sophie's letters explained that after the death of his first wife, Robert remarried and left Paris for London in 1789, at the age of forty. While living in London, his second wife Françoise Bruère (or Bruyère) gave birth to five children. The short-lived Peace of Amiens (1802–03) allowed Robert to return to France, where, with his brother Pierre he founded a school in Tours. He died in Tours in 1811 without ever having seen his English family again or even letting them know where he was.

Daphne gives the name 'Françoise Bruyère' to the main character's wife, suggesting an analogy between her émigré ancestor and the main character of *The Scapegoat*. Although the period and the circumstances are vastly different, both men leave their family in Sarthe for London, and then return home. The émigré's sister, Sophie, was married to François Duval, who managed her family's glass factory just prior to the Revolution. After the Revolution, the Duvals retired to a hamlet called Le Gué de Launay near Vibraye, Sarthe. One of Sophie and Robert's sisters married a M. Talbert.

Sophie's letter states that her mother's maiden name was Labbé: in a footnote she adds that her 'superb' mother had a 'very masculine' character

and was nicknamed ‘the queen of Hungary’. These attributes inspired Daphne’s creation in *The Scapegoat* of Béla, a near-anagram of Labbé. Béla is Hungarian and has ‘the name of successive Hungarian kings’: she is the main character’s mistress.

Daphne’s research into her ancestor’s origins in the department of Sarthe began in 1950 with a letter from Fernande Yvon to the departmental archivist. It was not until the autumn of 1955 that Daphne herself first visited the region. She did not drive at the time and had initially planned to travel to France with her husband, Sir Frederick Browning (called Tommy). A former senior officer in the British Army, Browning was employed as Prince Philip’s treasurer.

In August, however, Daphne mentioned in a letter that Tommy ‘had his liver and then lumbago for the Regatta, and couldn’t sail’. She added in a postscript, ‘My plans have got all changed, as [Tommy] at the last moment doesn’t want to motor me to France, as it would be a rush for him to get back to Prince P[hilip] and Denmark. So I am making Jeanne take me in her car instead, Noel too!’ Noel Welch was the companion of Daphne’s younger sister Jeanne.

According to a local newspaper, the three women stayed at the Château de Beauchamp in Villaines-la-Gonais. Villaines is about 10 km from the town of La Ferté-Bernard – called ‘Villars’ in *The Scapegoat* – and 15 km from the village of Semur-en-Vallon – ‘St Gilles’. Daphne did not know, and Sophie herself may not have known, that in 1720 the paternal grandparents of Robert and Sophie had been married in the church of Semur. It is located between the glass factories of La Pierre and Montmirail, where Sophie’s father, uncle, brothers and husband would be employed or which they would direct in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

On her return to Cornwall, Daphne wrote that ‘Jeanne and Noel were very nice to be with, and I was glad for Jeanne to have the chance.’ After hiring a researcher and conducting extensive research in both France and England, she would publish her retelling of French family history, *The Glass-Blowers*, eight years later. But the immediate result of her 1955 holiday was *The Scapegoat*, which she finished writing within eight months of returning home.

THE SCAPEGOAT

The novel's opening chapters set out its basic premise. The scapegoat of the title is John, the narrator. The self-described 'law-abiding, quiet, donnish individual of thirty-eight' is a lecturer in French history who has spent the summer holiday doing research in Orléans, Blois and Tours:

> As I drove out of Tours, on the last morning, my dissatisfaction with the lectures I should give in London, and my realisation that all I had ever done in life, not only in France but in England also, was to watch people, never to partake in their happiness or pain, brought such a sense of overwhelming depression, deepened by the rain stinging the windows of the car, that when I came to Le Mans, although I had not intended to stop there and lunch, I changed my mind, hoping to change my mood.

After a meal in a crowded brasserie, John's depression returns as he observes the other diners: 'I should never be a Frenchman, never be one of them.'

Leaving the brasserie, John 'walked aimlessly along the street, my lack of purpose, my shifting gaze, my very clothes – grey flannel bags, tweed jacket too well worn over a span of years – betraying me as an Englishman in this jostling crowd of provincials on market day'. He reflects that the provincials would all return home at the end of the day:

> Meanwhile I, time no object, would check in at yet another strange hotel, and be accepted as one of them until I produced my British passport; then the bow, the smile, the genuine show of politeness, and the little shrug of regret. 'We have very few people at the moment. The season is over. Monsieur has the place to himself,' the implication being that surely I must want to plunge into a bunch of hearty compatriots, carrying Kodaks, exchanging snapshots, lending Penguins, borrowing each other's *Daily Mail*. Nor would they ever know, these people of the hotel where I passed a night, any more than those whom I now jostled in the street, that I wanted neither my compatriots nor my own company, but instead the happiness, which could never be mine, of

> feeling myself one of them, bred and schooled amongst them, bound by some tie of family and blood that they would recognise and understand; so that, living with them, I might share their laughter, fathom their sorrow, eat their bread, no longer stranger's bread but mine and theirs.

The rain leads John to take shelter in the church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Couture, where he contemplates his feeling of failure. He has a half-formed plan to stop in Mortagne on his way north and spend a few days at the Cistercian monastery of la Grande Trappe 'to find the courage to go on living'. He decides to have a drink at the train station buffet in order to come to a decision.

By pure chance John meets his exact double – Comte Jean de Gué – at the buffet and they share a few drinks. 'Le Gué de Launay' – the name of Sophie Duval's hamlet – inspired the surname 'de Gué', which the author gives to the Count and his family, who live in the Château de St Gilles. John mentions his plan of spending a few days at la Grande Trappe, leading the count to ask why: a woman? money? some sort of scrape? cancer? alcoholism? homosexuality? He suggests that 'There must be something seriously wrong if you want to go to la Grande Trappe.'

The Comte persuades the Englishman to go on to a restaurant, where he raises his glass and drinks 'To your sojourn at la Grande Trappe.' John hears his own voice saying, 'Surely at la Grande Trappe, where men live by silence, they must have an answer to this, they must know how to fill the vacuum, for they have deliberately gone into darkness to find light.'

As he listens the Comte's eyes are 'flippant and amused'. He advises John: 'If you knew as much about religion as I do you would run from it like the plague.' For him 'the only motive force in human nature is greed', and 'the thing to do is to minister to the greed, and to give people what they want'. Yet he finds people are never satisfied. John complains his own life is empty, but to Jean de Gué 'it sounds like paradise. An apartment to yourself, no family ties, no business worries, the whole of London a playground, if you wish […].'

After several cognacs, the Comte drugs his unwitting companion, takes his clothes and his Ford Consul and leaves him passed out in a hotel room, obliging the scapegoat to adopt the Comte's clothing, his car and his life when the Comte's chauffeur comes to collect him in the morning. The body of the novel concerns John's life at the château: his attempts to fulfil the desires of Jean de Gué's morphine-addicted mother, his pregnant wife, his daughter, his sister, his brother and sister-in-law, as well as the workers in the family glass factory.

Semur-en-Vallon, the château

When the Comte's luggage is unpacked, the Englishman finds wrapped packages, apparently for each of the de Gués. One is marked 'Maman', but the others are labelled with initials only. On his first night at the château, John dines with the Comte's mother in her room. When she insists he must have something for her, he delivers her gift and later deduces it contained vials of morphine. The package labelled 'F' pleases the Comte's wife Françoise: she receives a locket with a miniature portrait of her husband. The book labelled 'M-N' is obviously meant for the Comte's young daughter Marie-Noel: she, too, is pleased with *La Petite Fleur*, the story of Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux.

The Comte's cruel sense of humour is apparent when his brother and sister-in-law, Paul and Renée, open their gifts in public: she receives a flimsy nightgown and her husband an elixir to counteract impotence. The Comte's profoundly religious sister Blanche leaves her gift unopened. It is an enormous bottle of a perfume called *Femme*; after unwrapping the gift himself John discovers a card for the Comte's mistress Béla – the perfume was obviously intended for her and not for his estranged sister Blanche.

John learns that the Comte has recently taken the decision to close the glassworks, due to the unfavourable conditions in a proposed contract; John recklessly promises to keep the foundry open and then goes to the bank to look into the state of the de Gué family finances. The only available source of capital would be the dowry of the Comte's wife – the former Françoise

Bruyère – but John learns at the bank that the money is held in trust. It 'could only be used by the parents on the birth of a male heir, and if no male child was born no one could touch a sou of the money until Françoise reached the age of fifty – unless, of course, she were to die before that age'.

The scapegoat also learns that the Comte's sister, Blanche, had once been engaged to marry Maurice Duval, the manager of the glass factory. Popular with the workers but suspected of having collaborated during the war years, Maurice Duval was murdered by a group of French resistants, led by Jean de Gué: his body was thrown into an empty well. Jean's brother, Paul, had been imprisoned during the war.

The novel's reference to resistants and collaborators is a displacement of the opposed stances on the French Revolution taken by the Du Mauriers' ancestor Robert, on the one hand, and on the other by his siblings who remained in France. His two brothers and three married sisters either actively participated in the Revolution or at least drew financial profit from it. Daphne uses the motif to illustrate moral ambiguity: Maurice Duval, the supposed collaborator, was loved and respected; Comte Jean de Gué, the resistant, is also a killer.

In St Gilles the second Sunday in October is the date of *la grande chasse*, but the donnish Englishman does not shoot. To avoid having to play the role of the lord of St Gilles on the day of the planned hunt, John throws Jean de Gué's watch into the fire, intentionally burning his hand as he attempts to retrieve it. His daughter, Marie-Noel, has seen him do this and insists on knowing why. He invents the excuse that he 'was thinking about someone who had been shot, murdered, a long time ago'. Marie-Noel knows how Maurice Duval died but has been forbidden to speak about it: her somewhat morbid fascination with religion has been encouraged by her aunt and the curé, and she admires what she takes for her father's 'great act of humiliation'.

Eager to escape the château after the hunt, the scapegoat spends the night with the Comte's mistress, Béla, in Villars. On his return, his daughter has gone missing. It transpires that Marie-Noel has been sleepwalking: she is found asleep and unhurt at the bottom of the well. Once the child is safe, her pregnant mother Françoise falls off the roof in what may or may not have been a suicide.

In the climax of the novel, Françoise's death means her husband will now have access to her dowry that had been held in trust, making it possible for the glass factory to continue. John also realises that every member of the de Gué family has inner guilt that they may have contributed to Françoise's death. Nonetheless, he helps the Comtesse begin to withdraw from her

morphine addiction, puts Blanche in charge of the glass factory, and sends Paul and Renée (who has had some sort of relationship with the Comte) to Paris, a base from which they can travel.

La Ferté-Bernard, Béla's house (with green shutters)

The novel ends after a week when the Comte telephones to say he is coming back to St Gilles and to arrange a meeting with his *remplaçant*. John goes to the meeting place with a revolver, intending to kill the Comte, but the curé arrives unexpectedly and removes the weapon. The Comte then arrives carrying a gun, as usual. John tells the Comte of all the changes he has made at the *verrerie*. The cynical Comte informs John that in London he has resigned his job, given up the lease of his flat, arranged the auction of his furniture and cleared out his bank account. They exchange clothes and the Comte walks John to his Ford, removing the cartridges from his gun.

In a final conversation with the Comte's mistress, Béla, John tells her he will continue his journey to the Abbaye de la Grande Trappe; his task is no longer to find out what to do with failure, but now to find out 'what to do with love'.

IN THE WAKE OF *THE SCAPEGOAT*

Within a year of her first trip to Sarthe, Daphne's agent was negotiating over film rights to *The Scapegoat*. MGM wanted Cary Grant in the lead role, while Daphne preferred the actor Alec Guinness, who reminded her of her father. In the end the author formed an independent production company with Alec Guinness.

Daphne herself returned to Paris for a week to meet up with her friend Ellen Doubleday. She wrote to Oriel that Frank Price, who worked for Doubleday in Paris, drove Ellen and her to Sarthe to 'check up on the environs for [the] book', and 'after Sarthe we *did* visit l'Abbaye de la Grande Trappe […] and I thought you and I must go there some time […]'.

After a meeting with Alec Guinness in London, Daphne wrote, 'I *knew* he was right for my man in my book, and when he told me he had spent five days in a Trappist monastery before becoming a Catholic six months ago, it absolutely tipped the scales!' She adds that 'We are now Daphne and Alec to each other in letters (it's all right, he is married to a devoted wife, and has a son of Kits's [her own son's] age, and they are all Catholics!).'

Once Oriel had read her new novel, Daphne commented that 'as far as I can realize, though I'm still a bit too close to it to judge, [the characters in *The Scapegoat*] are completely imaginary, and not one Peg, or even tiny bits of real people'. 'Pegs' are a recurring topic of Daphne's correspondence with her friend. Oriel defines a Peg or to Peg as 'Someone whom one momentarily invests with romantic glamour, but more particularly as the inspiration for a fictional character.'

In the same letter Daphne goes on to assert that in this regard *The Scapegoat* is 'just the opposite' of her earlier novel *My Cousin Rachel* (1951): '*Rachel* was so Pegged, i.e. so much of what I felt about Ellen at that time, and Nelson [Doubleday], all incredibly mixed-up of course, that if I was writing my autobiography, I would have to say it was the most *emotionally-felt* book I had ever written.' She then returns to *The Scapegoat*: 'I know that it has been written from a sort of spiritual awareness, which is not emotional and that is why the people are *not* Pegged.' She adds

parenthetically, ‘I shall probably begin to Peg Guinness, if I am “in” with him over the film!’

Finally, Daphne mentions that

> I have been reading an interesting book about La Trappe, which I bought there, and in it, describing the Monastery, it says there is an ‘Hôtellerie des Dames’. It surely can’t be true? I know men go for a Retreat, but surely not women? Could you bear to write and ask? We might have gone together some time.

In her next letter to Oriel, Daphne comments: ‘Everything is so beastly in the world, that I feel more like going to La Grande Trappe than ever, but what can one do?’ Referring to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, ‘I’m torn between wanting to go and bury myself in La Trappe, and wanting to fly to Hungary, to help poor bleeding people (and preferably with Alec dressed in International Red Cross uniform at my side!).’

Daphne appears to take it for granted that Oriel shares her interest in La Trappe. There are two possible reasons for this. Oriel was a Roman Catholic and also a writer; Daphne apparently associated living ‘by silence’ as the Trappists did with the writer’s craft. She herself was less religious than her sisters. Jeanne Du Maurier’s companion, Noel Welch, wrote that ‘Angela has never deviated from the High Anglican faith in which she was brought up,’ while ‘Jeanne became a Catholic […] but, as she says, she was really only returning to the creed of her French ancestors.’ However, Noel also notes that ‘There is something of the recluse in [Daphne], something of the monk. Like Jeanne she is fascinated by monasteries and barracks.’

According to Daphne’s biographer, Christmas 1956 was especially happy for the Brownings, with both daughters married and two young grandchildren. Early in the new year Daphne began focusing on her research for what would eventually become *The Glass-Blowers*. For a brief period she dated her letters to Oriel according to the French revolutionary calendar. The crack came in July 1957, the month the Brownings were to celebrate their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. Daphne’s husband had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalised for three weeks.

Daphne might feel she ‘had put emotions for other people (except my family) away for good some years ago’, as she wrote in a letter cited in her biography, but her husband, who was ten years older than she, had clearly not done the same. On returning from the hospital, Daphne received a telephone call from a woman Tommy knew through his involvement with the ballet and the Royal Academy of Dancing: the caller informed Daphne

that Tommy had been living a double life. Daphne was already aware of her husband's flirtation with a young woman in Fowey but had not known of his relationship with the woman who called, and never learned of her husband's affair in this period with a third woman he had met through Palace connections.

In a highly personal letter of July 1957 to a close family friend, Daphne stated that on this friend's advice she had just written a long letter to her husband,

> […] saying how to blame I had been for so much of his unhappiness during the past years, and came clean about the Puxley man, and then tried to explain in easy language for him to grasp how my obsessions – you can only call them that – for poor old Ellen [Doubleday] and Gertrude [Lawrence] – were all part of a nervous breakdown going on *inside myself*, partly to do with my muddled troubles, and writing, and a fear of facing reality.

In short, Tommy's breakdown led Daphne to admit to her own past affair and to several past obsessions. According to Daphne, these obsessions were part of her own nervous breakdown, which had partly to do with her writing. The letter reveals the very great extent to which she believed her novels were 'Pegged'.

In the early 1940s, when Browning's military responsibilities meant that he and his wife were separated, Daphne had had an affair with a man called Henry Puxley. In different ways, she felt, Puxley had inspired both *Frenchman's Creek* (1941) and *Hungry Hill* (1943).

Daphne goes on to ground her obsessions for Ellen Doubleday and Gertrude Lawrence in the 'fear of facing reality' that came to the fore when she was sued in an American court for having plagiarised *Rebecca* (1938). The novel had been inspired by Daphne's feelings of jealousy of her husband's previous fiancée. The fact that this might come up when she was in the witness box and make publicity terrified her to the extent that she was 'nearly off her rocker'. This was not really an irrational fear. The more detail Daphne could provide of the personal circumstances that led her to write *Rebecca*, the less convincing the accusation of plagiarism would be.

But these personal circumstances would surely also have led to unwanted publicity – perhaps particularly in New York, where the trial took place. Browning's previous fiancée, Jan Ricardo, had married Captain Ian Maxwell in 1937. Daphne's older sister, Angela, was one of the numerous wedding guests, and footage of the ceremony was included on the Gaumont newsreel

in April. If the flourishing ‘R’ in Jan Ricardo’s signature on letters Daphne discovered prompted her to name her character ‘Rebecca’, Ricardo’s married surname ‘Maxwell’ presumably also inspired her to name Rebecca’s husband ‘Max de Winter’. At the time Browning had been engaged to Jan, his parents had just let Flaxley Abbey in Gloucestershire, the previous seat of the then recently deceased Frank Crawley-Boevey: in *Rebecca* the manager of the Manderley estate is called Frank Crawley.

Finally, Jan Ricardo’s mother, Norah Bell Ricardo, was American: she was the granddaughter of James Gordon Bennett Sr, the founder of the *New York Herald*. At the time of the plagiarism trial both Norah Ricardo and Jan Ricardo Maxwell were dead: in the summer of 1944 they died by suicide, two months apart, according to Browning’s biographer. If Daphne had named Jan Ricardo in her testimony, it is entirely plausible that New York newspapers covering the trial would have seen fit to publish this information.

Daphne stayed with the Doubledays during the trial and once she was acquitted of plagiarism, she explained that she turned to Ellen as a symbol of the terrific reliance and love that she had once had for Fernande Yvon (and would later have for the actress Gertrude Lawrence). Gertrude had once had a relationship with Daphne’s father; Ellen was the wife of Daphne’s American publisher. Daphne makes the point that this nexus of relationships underlies her play *September Tide* and her novel *The Parasites*, both published in 1949, as well as *My Cousin Rachel* (1951).

Du Maurier’s next novel, *Mary Anne* (1954), had been originally planned as a play for Gertrude Lawrence to star in, but the play lost its inspiration when the actress died rather suddenly. Daphne’s letter suggests that this ‘nervous breakdown going on *inside myself*’ explains her neglect of her husband between 1947 and 1952. The novelist had been greatly affected by Gertrude’s death in 1952: it may have been the factor that caused her to ‘put emotions for other people (except my family) away for good’.

In her confessional letter Daphne then turns to her urge to go to France to find out about forebears, which led to *The Scapegoat*. After her husband’s breakdown, she realised that his real reason for ‘backing out’ of their planned trip to France had less to do with his professional responsibilities than with the ‘double life’ he was leading at the time. She goes back on her earlier claim that in *The Scapegoat* the characters ‘are not Pegged’. Her letter asserts that ‘though I have worked out, these last few days, all the characters in *Scapegoat* and what they represent, I don’t want to resurrect *Rebecca* in reverse’.

The letter does not detail what all the characters in *Scapegoat* represent. Instead, Daphne gives two alternate castings for the principal roles in *Rebecca*. In the first casting, the novelist herself is Rebecca and Rebecca's lovers are her books, her husband shoots her and she returns to haunt a future wife. In the second casting, her husband's young woman friend in Fowey is killed at sea, then discovered in the boat and brought to the surface to haunt Daphne. In both cases, 'The evil in us comes to the surface.'

Rebecca portrayed a familiar triangle: Max de Winter, his nameless second wife, and her obsession with his first wife Rebecca. The cast of characters in the more recent *Scapegoat* was more complex and perhaps more relevant to Daphne's current situation: Comte Jean de Gué and Françoise, Renée and Béla; and John, *le remplaçant*.

If an author's 'lovers are her books', as in the 'resurrection' of *Rebecca* Daphne describes, then the Comte's pregnant wife could be the novelist herself, hoping to give birth to a new book. The Comte could then be interpreted as a figure of Daphne's husband, who backed out of their planned trip and left the driving instead to a *remplaçante* – in this case, his sister-in-law Jeanne Du Maurier. When the Comte trades places with the scapegoat, his unspoken thought is that the death of his pregnant wife would resolve his financial difficulties. Daphne's biographers have made the point that her income from writing was the main support of her family, including paying for her husband's boats.

Alternatively, Daphne could be seen as the Comte, generally preoccupied by 'Pegs' and writing and away from London where her husband was employed, leaving him in the hands of various *remplaçantes* and possibly suicidal. This approximates Daphne's own post-breakdown interpretation of the problem in her marriage.

In the event, the Brownings' twenty-fifth anniversary celebration was cancelled, and after recuperating in Cornwall, Tommy went back to London. Daphne decided that when her husband returned to work, she would have to spend more time in London and less in Fowey:

> I shall have to be up in this blasted city more than I used to be, because the doctors say Tommy must not exhaust himself by coming down for snatched weekends after a tiring week in London, so I've faced up to duty and told myself I must be more of a domestic wife now we've turned our Silver Wedding Anniversary.

Shortly after Daphne wrote this letter, her mother died at home in Cornwall. According to Oriel Malet, Lady Du Maurier had suffered for years from a

depressive form of senility.

Writing to Oriel in December 1957, Daphne pondered over the meaning of a (slightly misquoted) biblical injunction:

> […] [W]hat about that awful severe word of, 'He who must save his life must lose it' – which might mean, for me, that everything I have loved – my life at Mena[billy] – must be given up. Has it been very selfish living here over the years? A Marriage Council person might say it has been, and that had I been ministering to [Tommy] he might never have cracked.

At the end of 1957 Daphne mentioned in a letter to Ellen Doubleday that her husband had suggested the alternative interpretation of their situation: he worried he had become 'the bad man' in *The Scapegoat.*

In 1958, Daphne's first novel *The Loving Spirit* (1931) was republished; in May she recalled in a newspaper interview that she and her future husband first met as a result of his appreciation of her book. He had left his boat in Fowey for the winter and when he came to get it in the spring of 1932, she had just had her appendix out:

> […] [S]o he said: 'I hear you can't row or anything. Would you like to come out in my boat?'
>
> It was rather woman's magaziney when you think about it.
>
> At any rate, we met in April, got engaged in May and married in July. And we went up the river in a boat to get married just as the couple did at the end of *The Loving Spirit*.

In June 1958, twenty-six years after their first meeting, Daphne and Tommy travelled to Sarthe to watch the filming of *The Scapegoat*. According to a brief *Daily News* item headed 'Dodged Away',

> Lieutenant-General Sir Frederick Browning, the Duke of Edinburgh's treasurer, spent yesterday watching the filming of one of his wife's novels.
>
> Mrs Browning is authoress Daphne Du Maurier, and *The Scapegoat* – her sixth novel to be filmed – is at present on location in La Ferté-Bernard […].
>
> The general yesterday took his own photographs of Alec Guinness and his beautiful French co-star Nicole Maurey [in the role of Béla].
>
> He has slipped out of London for a week 'because everyone at the Palace was at Ascot.' The first result: he went down with sunstroke.

Nicole Maurey and Alec Guinness with Frederick Browning and Daphne Du Maurier on location in Sarthe

The title of the article refers to Daphne's husband's temporary absence from his professional responsibilities at the Palace, and it also describes the opening premise of her novel: Comte Jean de Gué takes the decision to dodge away from his wife and family.

Around the time of *The Scapegoat* – novel and film – both Brownings had more or less 'dodged away' from a marriage that was no longer very 'woman's magaziney'.

PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR ON LA GRANDE TRAPPE

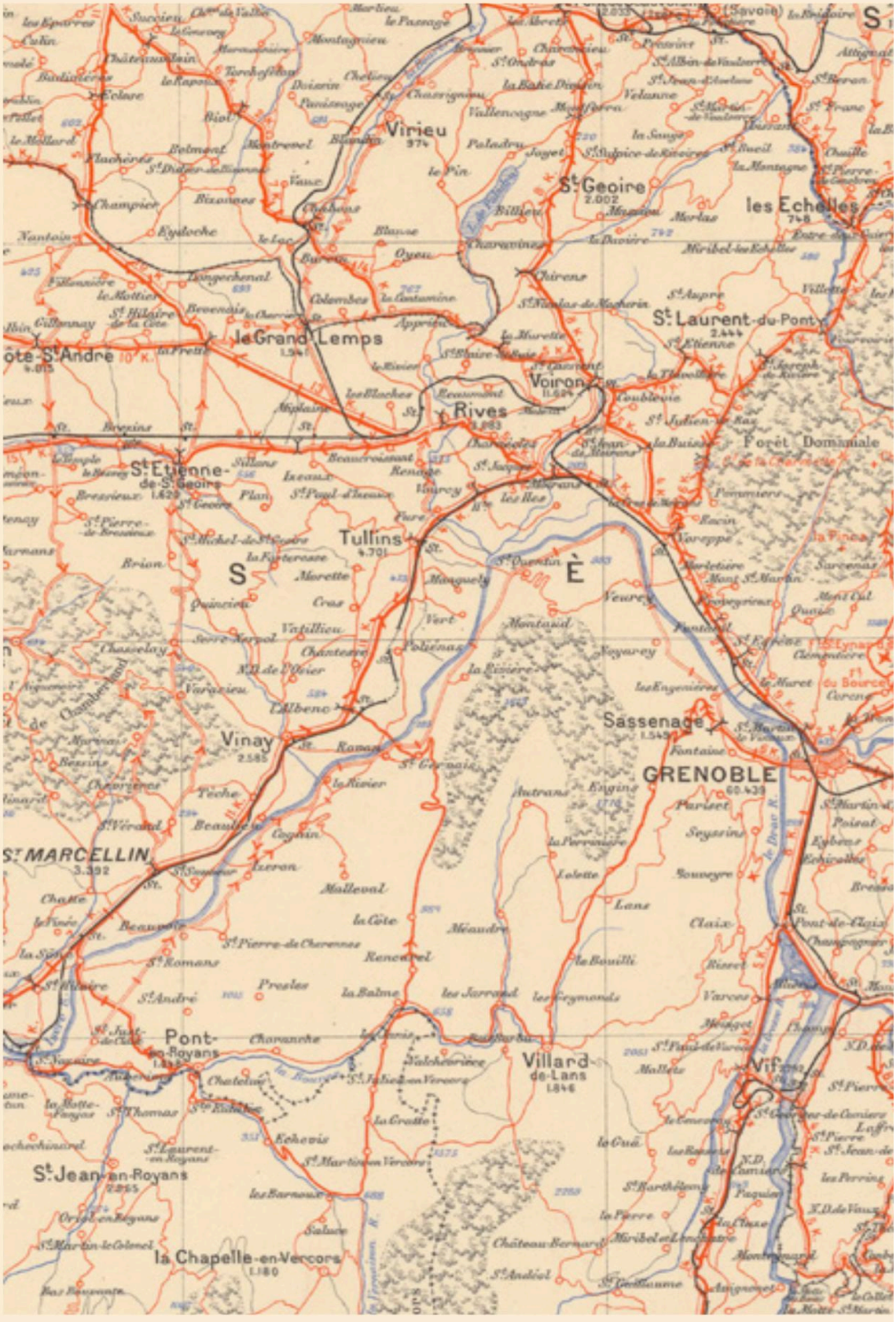
The celebrated travel writer, Patrick Leigh Fermor, wrote about his stay at the abbey in the essay ‘From Solesmes to La Grande Trappe’, first published in 1950.

> […] Solesmes was a temporary halt on the journey to a far stranger monastery: la Grande Trappe, the fountain head of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance. My curiosity, which had been aroused by the reputation of this abbey, by the role it has played in French history and in the whole monastic life of the Church, has been strengthened by a fortuitous encounter with a young Englishman who had spent a year as a Trappist postulant. Shot down during the war in the bomber he was piloting, he had studied, after his release from German prisoner-of-war camp, for the Anglican ministry. He had then gone over to Rome and plunged into the depths of a Trappist monastery. When we met he had just abandoned it for a Benedictine foundation, as the severity of the Trappist discipline had left him no time for study or solitude. I planned at once to leave for the Grande Trappe.

Abbaye de la Grande Trappe

I set out from Le Mans, where, on a high rock above the steep roofs of the town, a slender Gothic cathedral is suspended in a spider's web of flying buttresses. An hour in Alençon, an afternoon in the market-place of Mortagne and a long crepuscular drive into the southern marches of Normandy were the stages of the journey which brought me, after dark and in drenching rain, to the village of Soligny-la-Trappe. According to the Vercingetorix-whiskered peasants in the *bistro*, the Abbey was still several miles away, and, it seemed, of Kafkaesque inaccessibility. The butcher's van which at last transported me thither broke down twice in the middle of a moor. When the wind abated, we heard bells ringing through the downpour. 'L'Angélus,' the butcher said, 'les moines se couchent' [the monks are going to bed]. An inky Gothic mass was soon perceptible and, a few moments later, the van had driven away, leaving me in front of an iron door. A one-eyed monk answered my ring and, after a friendly greeting, started off into the dark. As I followed him I could hear his clogs dragging on the flagstones and then making sucking noises in the mud. The Père Hôtelier gave me some food, and led me to a cell. His head was cropped except for a narrow hoop. His dress, too, was different from that of the Benedictines: a white full-sleeved habit with a black hood and a black scapular caught in at the middle with a brown belt. My cell was freezingly cold and, apart from a bust of Saint Bernard, quite bare. On a sheet of paper pinned to the wall were written in wavering script

three columns of priestly attributes: poverty, humility, sacrifice, death to life – the catalogue enumerated a score. At the foot of the first column were the words: *Le prêtre est un homme dépouillé* [The priest is a man who is stripped of everything]. *Plus on est mort* [The more one is dead], the second ended, *plus on a la vie* [the more one is alive]. *Le prêtre est un homme crucifié* [The priest is a crucified man]. *Il faut devenir du bon pain* [One must become good bread], said the third. *Le prêtre est un homme mangé* [The priest is a man who is consumed].


Virieu
St Geoire
les Echelles
St Laurent-du-Pont
le Grand Lemps
Voiron
Rives
Forêt Domaniale
St Etienne-de-St Geoirs
Tullins
Sassenage
GRENOBLE
Vinay
St MARCELLIN
Pont-en-Royans
Villard-de-Lans
St Jean-en-Royans
la Chapelle-en-Vercors

SURROUNDINGS OF GRENOBLE

JUNE 1966

SNOWMELT

> Had anyone told me, a week before, that I should pass some hours in the society of Frances Crozier and find them pleasant, I would have protested in pain and outrage. Yet there … we were. Two old women, resting in the sun.
>
> – STELLA GIBBONS, *THE SNOW-WOMAN*

> [A] peculiar lightening and stirring […] had begun to take place within me after the first sight of Frances looking down at me from the upper terrace at Belair. It was like that delicate sense of night having ended and dawn drawing near; there is no light, thickest darkness shrouds the world, yet there is a nameless scent and the almost inaudible rustling of a soft fitful wind.
>
> *– IBID*

Stella Dorothea Gibbons was born in London in January 1902. Her father, Telford, was a medical doctor, and he and his wife, Maude, went on to have two sons. Stella was educated at home and from 1915 at the North London Collegiate School, where she was in the same class as the poet Stevie Smith (many years later Rumer Godden met Smith on the Poetry Panel and described her as 'my chief bonus from the Arts Council').

Stella spent two years at University College, London, obtaining a Diploma in Journalism in 1923. From the following year she was employed by the news service, British United Press, and on holiday she first visited Boulogne-sur-Mer. Other destinations in the 1920s were Switzerland and Italy.

Stella's parents both died in 1926 and her brothers went to live with her in a cottage in the Vale of Health, Hampstead. They stayed together for the next four years. Stella lost her job in 1926 but found another as secretary to the editor of the *Evening Standard*, and eventually began contributing stories and articles. In 1930, Stella lost that job, supposedly due to her unhappiness over the ending of her love affair with Walter Beck.

Within a month of leaving the newspaper, according to her biographer, Stella had a better job as editorial assistant to *The Lady*. Her colleagues there

were Kathleen Goddard and Elizabeth Coxhead. Stella recalled:

> Between us, we covered the sub-editing, the new goods likely to interest ladies (there were ladies in those days) in the peaceful pleasant shops of the late 'twenties, and the cinema, while for me there was occasionally a play to criticise or a clutch of novels to review. It was one plum of a job.

Stella began writing her first novel while working at *The Lady*, and would read sections of her work in progress when having lunch with her two colleagues:

> We used to go to Honeydew, a café vanished with our youth, and lunch there while I read the latest bit of *Cold Comfort Farm* aloud to the other two.
>
> We used to stuff our round young faces with hot dogs, newly sprung upon London by the Canadian proprietor, and choke with laughter. I suppose the other customers must have noticed us; the proprietor certainly did, because he used to hover round our table in a state, and more than once asked us to please *go*, as other people were waiting for our seats.
>
> At Honeydew, Elizabeth gave me the farm's name, that of a real farm in the Midlands; another friend insisted on the final *e* of Flora Poste's name. But I think now that it was the delighted laughter of these two, [Kathleen] and Elizabeth, that was the best present of all. They were my first public, and I used to get back from lunch drunk on orange juice and my power to make people laugh.

The novel's original title had been 'Curse God Farm': Elizabeth Coxhead suggested changing it to the name of a farm near her father's grammar school, where tenant after tenant had gone bankrupt. Elizabeth remembered Stella's reaction to her idea: 'Nature always goes one better than art – do you think the present tenants would mind if I took the name?' 'You may be quite certain they'll never read the book,' Elizabeth assured her, and so the title was found. Stella kept in touch with Elizabeth Coxhead, who would become significant for *The Snow-Woman* as well as for contributing the title of *Cold Comfort Farm*. Many years after the two women met on the staff of *The Lady*, it was Stella's visit to Elizabeth's holiday home near Grenoble that inspired her 1969 novel, *The Snow-Woman*.

Before leaving the *Evening Standard*, Stella met Allan Bourne Webb, who had just been accepted at a school of singing. They became engaged in 1931, when Allan started singing professionally, and *Cold Comfort Farm* was published in 1932. A year later the novel was clearly a success: Stella gave up her job at *The Lady*, and married Allan on 1 April 1933. In May, Stella's novel won the *Prix Étranger* given by the *Prix Fémina Vie Heureuse.* The Webbs' daughter Laura, their only child, was born in 1935.

Between 1930 and 1970 Stella published an average of almost a book a year, mostly novels but sometimes poems or short story collections. From November 1939 to September 1943 she wrote 'A Woman's Diary of the War', a series of monthly articles for *St Martin's Review*. According to her biographer, she loved France, its culture and literature especially, and stated in the Diary for August 1940: 'I cannot write about the fate of France, because I know what the English Queen meant when she said that Calais would be written on her heart when she was dead. "France" will be written on mine.' Stella was inspired by hearing General de Gaulle on the wireless. She even wrote to him and received a reply, thanking her for her encouragement.

A bomb hit Stella's publisher's warehouse in 1944, destroying its contents; of her early novels only *Cold Comfort Farm* was reprinted. In an article titled 'C of E', Stella dated the final stage of her religious conversion to 1945: 'At the age of forty-three the struggle was over: with a last dextrous turn of the guiding switch, the silly sheep that was Mrs W--- [i.e. Stella] went meekly into the fold, and the shepherd shut the gate.' She refers in the article to the fact that her husband was a Christian: Allan Bourne Webb was the son of a clergyman and the grandson of the Dean of Salisbury. Stella was baptised into the Church of England in 1947.

Stella's husband enlisted in the army at the age of thirty-three and was sent to the Middle East. He had a desk job and spent most of his time in Cairo. After the war Allan used an inheritance to buy the lease of a second-hand bookshop in Highgate; he died of cancer in 1959. Stella's brother, Gerald, also died in the 1950s; her favourite brother, Lewis, lived until 1976.

In 1929, Stella had anonymously published a piece called 'Three Women I Would Like to Be When I Am Forty, the Confessions of a Woman of Twenty-seven'. The third woman she describes 'is a nice old muddle'. This woman 'is utterly happy by herself in a foreign country with a map which she can't read, and absorbing sounds and colours and scents and people'. When the war ended Stella was forty-three and she resumed her travels, visiting Switzerland, Austria and Venice, sometimes accompanied by her daughter.

At the invitation of Elizabeth Coxhead, Stella made her last trip to the continent in June 1966. She was accompanied by her sister-in-law, Renée Bourne Webb, an actress, and Renée's husband, John Oliver, the art editor of the *Bystander*.

A VISIT TO CRUZILLE

The party left England by ferry on 14 June 1966, arriving in Calais and stopping in Beauvais. The following day they visited the Château de La Rochepot in the department of Côte-d'Or. And from 16–26 June they stayed with Elizabeth Coxhead in her house called Cruzille, in Tullins, about 30 km from Grenoble.

Tullins, Elizabeth Coxhead, Renée Oliver and Stella Gibbons at Cruzille

Elizabeth had inherited the house from an aunt a few years previously. She sold it in 1970, but made a few references to 'the rambling old house in the foothills of the French Alps' she shared with her siblings, in her book *One Woman's Garden* (dealing mainly with her suburban English garden):

Tullins-Cruzille - Ancienne Maison forte, transformée en couvent en 1632, les dames Ursulines y restèrent installées jusqu'à la Revolution. Aujourd'hui propriété privée.

Tullins, Cruzille, a former Ursuline convent

> […] [T]he garden of the French house has its charms, the greatest being that I don't have to work in it. Along with Cruzille, we have inherited Rose and Richard, who have given it nearly forty years of loving care […].
>
> [Richard] grows us wonderful vegetables, and a few carnations and zinnias for the house; for the rest, the garden has gone wild. But there is evidence that the friend who left the place to my aunt, and whose family home it had been since the Revolution, was a knowledgeable gardener. […]
>
> At Cruzille I lie on the terrace and watch the colours changing on the mountains, and Richard weeding – or not weeding, for his method is to let everything get waist-high and run to seed, and then have a blitz.

The history of the house is somewhat unclear, but its name and appearance suggest it had once been part of a fortified house that was transformed into an Ursuline convent in 1632. In the revolutionary period the nuns were evicted, and the convent and its dependences were repossessed by the state and sold. The house that Stella's friend, Elizabeth, would later inherit was apparently purchased by Claude-Antoine Mazet, a former bailiff.

In the Second Empire, Mazet's son, Claude-Aimé Mazet, served as a lieutenant in the Regiment of Guides and became a knight in the Legion of Honour. In 1867, he married an English widow and in the same year their daughter, Marie-Aimée Mazet, was born in Paris. After their marriage the Mazets lived for a time in Cheltenham, in a house on the Prestbury Road that they named Cruzille-Villa. Marie-Aimée married Walter Richard Haighton Chappel, a wealthy Englishman, and eventually inherited her grandfather's home in Tullins. Mrs Chappel died in Tullins in 1941 and the house then went to Elizabeth Coxhead's aunt.

Tullins, John Oliver in the uniform of the Régiment des Guides (found in the house)

During their ten days in Tullins, Stella and her friends visited the monastery of La Grande Chartreuse. The weather must have been hot because other photographs show the visitors at the Robert Lakes in Chamrousse, at Lake Paladru and at the local swimming pool. They left Tullins on 26 June, and on 27 June on their way north they stopped at Illiers, better known as the Combray of Proust, Stella's favourite writer.

MISS MAUDE BARRINGTON

The Snow-Woman opens on a gloomy afternoon in March. Maude Barrington, the seventy-something narrator, has lived alone in Highgate since the death of her parents; her father had been a lecturer in the classics at the University of London. Maude is not exactly an unreliable narrator, but she is certainly a very controlled person who is set in her ways and highly judgmental of other people.

As the novel opens, Maude is awaiting the arrival of Lionel Crozier, a slightly younger family friend whom she has not seen for ten years and about whom she feels somewhat ambivalent. Maude's housekeeper, Millie, is preparing coconut kisses, Lionel's favourite. Maude is surprised when he arrives with a young woman she has never seen before called Teddie Parker. Teddie, apparently in the late stage of pregnancy, is wearing 'a kind of Greek tunic ending above her knees, made of black stuff and divided into four sections by lines of a crude pink'.

Maude and Lionel begin discussing their common friend, Charles Handel, a renowned, now-elderly American art critic and historian who lives in France. Lionel works for Charles, who has recently given him a villa called Les Gentianes, below Belair, the home Charles built after the war in the village of Saint-Benoît (based on Tullins), near Grenoble.

Maude explains: 'There have been many occasions when I have longed to order Lionel out of the room. This was one. There he sat, wearing a boldly-striped suit of youthful cut, and from the curious way in which his hair was trimmed, to the rose in his button hole, he seemed to me pathetic. Irritating, too, but chiefly pathetic.' Lionel alludes briefly to his elder sister, Frances, a name Maude has not spoken aloud for many years. As she talks to Lionel, Maude gradually becomes aware that Teddie is feeling very uncomfortable and is, in fact, about to give birth.

Maude immediately leaves the room, directing Millie to go in and do something. She herself packs a nightgown, puts on her coat and leaves home for a neighbour's house. Walking up the path of her front garden, she notices 'that the Poetaz narcissis were going to be unusually fine this year'. After learning by telephone that Teddie has safely given birth on the sofa that is

Maude's legacy from her Great-Aunt Dorothea, and has left the house, Maude returns home and orders supper from Millie.

Lionel has left a message from Teddie: 'Tell the lady I'm sorry I had my son on her sofa.'

INVITATION AU VOYAGE

The following morning, Maude, a professional accompanist, is practising Duparc's *L'invitation au voyage*. She is somewhat disturbed by the memory of Teddie's message, which she had first thought must have been Lionel's own message. Now, she feels, the message 'was a tiny novel, in twelve words, and it had not been written by Lionel Crozier'.

After about an hour, Maude's practise is interrupted by a telephone call from Lionel. He has something he wants to talk to her about, and suggests they meet for lunch. Maude accepts and finds that Lionel's purpose is to invite her to come back to France with him for a month's visit to their friend Charles Handel. Maude eventually agrees and, after picking up Lionel's Jaguar in Calais, they head toward Boulogne-sur-Mer.

In the car, Maude's thoughts turn to her three brothers:

> France! My brothers' bodies lie there. Jock and Harry are buried in one of the smaller cemeteries in the north where the terrible battles of 1915–16 were fought. Edward, dearest to me of the three, is literally one with the French earth; he was blown to pieces in 1918, and no remains were ever traced.
>
> So France, for me, means memories and pain. But it also means Order, perhaps my favourite among the qualities which are distinctively human; order in its splendid architecture, and in the undeviating roads built in the tradition of the Roman ones; order, above all, in the French language. I love that country, and with my love there is pain. Ambivalence! Always ambivalence.

In Beauvais, Maude and Lionel have an excellent dinner and spend the first night, and then go on to Versailles, where they have lunch and from where Lionel calls Teddie. From Versailles they travel through the forest of Fontainebleau to the Autoroute du Sud. Maude loves motoring but has recently been advised not to take the wheel herself due to a heart condition. She comments to Lionel that the thought of other people's deaths is much

worse than the thought of one's own and is incredulous when Lionel then mentions Arthur Courtney: 'You ought to have married him.' (Arthur Courtney is presumably a transposition of Walter Beck, Stella's first love.)

At Pont-sur-Yonne the pair have the pleasantest dinner of their journey – until, that is, Lionel brings up 'those Parkers': 'I hope everything *will* be all right, now the child's arrived.' Lionel mentions that the Parkers live in a council house, and that Teddie's 'a good little manager':

> 'One would not suspect powers of management from her behaviour the other day,' I could not refrain from observing. 'And her appearance was not …'
>
> Lionel instantly 'flared up', like some tiresome firework which has been temporarily quiescent.
>
> 'A kid can be a good manager in an Op-Art shift. I suppose that's what's upsetting you.'
>
> 'I thought it grotesquely inappropriate to her condition, certainly.'

Maude imagines Lionel is intending to make her face reality, but her opinion is that 'I lived as unmarried women of our class with money have always lived, and I felt no guilt about it.' 'I'll bet you've decided the child was born three months after marriage, too,' Lionel continues. Maude had thought 'there might be an irregularity of some kind' and confesses to the reader that 'I could on occasion have wondered about Lionel's own paternity. He might have Italian or Spanish blood; he *is* so emotional and peculiar; quite un-English.'

The following morning it is April, and Lionel and Maude make for Beaune and Champforgeuil where, he tells her, there's 'a fifteenth-century château […] you might like to see, and it'll take the last taste of England out of our mouths'. (There is a château in Champforgeuil, but the Château d*e* La Rochepot which the author visited on her 1966 trip is better-known and much more in the style of 'Mélusine's castle', as Maude describes it.) Lionel's comment is, 'I don't go for Disney architecture.'

Maude expects Lionel to say there is 'a *relais* attached to [the château] with a *cuisine* of international fame', but he just remarks that the village has a newish, quite presentable hotel with good food. This depresses Maude and sets her thinking about her lost love, Arthur Courtney. She remembers that

she, Arthur and two of her brothers had spent a week in Paris in 1913, with their Great-Aunt Dorothea:

> All young people feel, consciously or unconsciously, that there has never been such laughter and delight as that peculiar to their own youth. This is a law of nature. But we – we who were under thirty in 1913 – we were the archetypes. There never was before or ever would again be such gaiety, because never before or again would such a darkness fall.

Maude's thoughts turn to her father's poem, *Lightheart*:

> It is in every popular anthology of verse published since 1919. I wish I did not know it by heart. In the years following Edward's death I used to awaken every morning with it repeating itself incessantly, mercilessly, in my inward ear. I believe now that the writing of it helped save my father from a collapse of some kind – a loss of all sense of order in the universe, perhaps, and, with him, my mother was also saved; but I had never been able to forgive him for writing it.

It is early in the season and Lionel and Maude are the only patrons at the restaurant, which is staffed by a smiling and attentive Greek family with small children, who are seated at another table. Somehow the sight of the children leads Maude to make a provocative remark that leads to the bitterest scene of the journey.

Maude comments to Lionel that there may still be some feeling against their common friend, Charles Handel, who is Jewish, 'because he ran away during the war'. Lionel retorts that Charles 'was over seventy when war broke out. I suppose you'd have liked him to stay there and be deported or shot. We all know there's a death-or-glory tradition in your family.' 'Yes, there is,' Maude replies, 'Both death and glory.' Lionel retreats from the argument after remarking that 'there are times when you don't seem to belong to this century at all, you're like something out of the *Chanson de Roland*'.

SAINT-BENOÎT AND BELAIR

On the last day of driving, Maude and Lionel travel on roads overlooking the Lac du Bourget, through the tunnel of Col de Couz, then fly past Saint-Laurent-du-Pont, Voiron, Tullins and St Marcellin (whereas, in reality, Stella and her party stayed at Cruzille in Tullins). Finally, they arrive at 'a wide stone plateau, scooped out from the hill, with a row of garages built of some white substance'. There are twelve garages in all, to stable 'the cars belonging to those guests who came on pilgrimage, "from all over the world"'.

Lionel tells her the garages were done by 'the American architect' Kessler; he compares them to the new Elephant House at the London Zoo. (The Elephant House was designed in the early 1960s by the architect Sir Hugh Casson, known for destroying Victorian buildings – not likely to please Maude.) To reach Charles's house, one must climb a steep hill; Maude 'has a heart' and blood pressure, as Stella did in later life. The first person to greet her calls down 'Hullo there […] Snow-Woman.' Maude knows instantly that the speaker is Lionel's older sister Frances, with whom she attended North London Collegiate school.

Lionel's surname (and his sister's maiden name) 'Crozier' suggests 'Cruzille', the name of Elizabeth Coxhead's house, and, obviously, 'Frances' contains the word 'France'. Frances's official married name is Mrs Robert Gelfors 3rd; when pronounced 'Frenchly', Frances's married surname is a homophone of the French 'gèle fort' (evoking a hard freeze).

The knowledge that Frances is staying with Lionel makes Maude feel her holiday is shattered. Yet she begins to recover when a properly trained servant brings first-class tea, first-class bread, and butter to her room. Maude can then explore her surroundings:

> It was all excessively up-to-date and attractive, in a hard style. I studied everything: walls, floor-coverings, ornaments (few of these, but even I could see that they were works of art; probably valuable; certainly ugly), curtains, lighting and all the unobtrusive small devices for comfort. The colours were clear and strong; everything seemed to be

> new. The place was as impersonal as a window-display at 'Habitat's,' but undeniably comfortable […].

Maude childishly selects her most becoming dress to wear when she next encounters Frances and allows herself a near-cold bath to calm down.

In the evening, Maude and the Croziers walk back up the hill, past the twelve garages to have dinner with Charles Handel and his wife, Mimi, at Belair. They find Charles, wearing an unusually full man's dressing-gown with a monkish cord, gazing out across the valley at the heights of the Chartreuse, which are touched with the orange glow of the setting sun. Maude is reminded of King Canute and the waves.

Mimi invites Maude into a long, Roman room:

> I call it Roman, because it reminded me of those reconstructions of Roman houses which I have seen in museums; there was the same impression of strong, grave colour, and richness, and bareness; there were even some busts of Late Roman emperors and the chairs were of reddish wood inlaid with ivory. I remembered that passage in *Marius the Epicurean* where Pater speaks of the hay-scent that floated along the passages in the old house of yellow marble in the country where Marius grew up […].

Lionel closes the windows and pulls the curtains, saying he particularly dislikes hay. Maude hardly knows what to say, since Charles 'had obviously become senile in a sad and embarrassing way'. During dinner she avoids, 'with an effortlessness which was the result of years of practice, the peevish or lunatic demands made on my attention by the ultra-contemporary pictures crowding the walls of the room, which in its style was also what I thought of as "Roman"'.

Stella Gibbons's nephew and biographer, Reggie Oliver, has written that through her narrator Maude, 'Stella is delicately probing her own emotional stasis after Allan's [her husband's] death.' The cast of characters who surround Maude in France – the Croziers and the Handels – seem not to reflect the relatives and the friend who were actually with the author in Tullins: her sister-in-law, brother-in-law and Elizabeth Coxhead.

Yet the central figure of the American émigré Handel, who has brought them all there, appears to have some connection to an inhabitant (or former inhabitant) of the region. The description of Charles Handel's 'Roman' house, Belair, high up on the hill, that attracts pilgrims, and the fact that

Maude describes Charles clothed in a dressing gown with a monkish cord, may be a reference to an American monk associated with the former monastery Parménie, which stands 750 m above Tullins.

Aerial view of the hermitage of Parménie, situated above Tullins

Parménie's Gallo-Roman well attests to the occupation of the site in antiquity, and in later years it became associated with the diocese of Grenoble. In the eighth century the bishops of Grenoble and Vienne took refuge there from Saracen invaders, and in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it became the object of pilgrimages. The Roman Catholic priest and later saint, Jean Baptiste de La Salle, made a brief but significant spiritual retreat there. According to some sources, between the French Revolution and the Second World War, Parménie was the meeting place of a cult.

In 1959, the American La Sallian monk, Leo Charles Burkhard, published a romanticised biography of La Salle, entitled *Un Gamin de Paris*, and in the early 1960s he began restoring Parménie in a vaguely modernist style. It became an international conference centre. Stella and the Olivers, spending ten days at Cruzille, might not have been aware of Parménie, but their hostess Elizabeth, who came there every summer, almost certainly would have known about it and may have taken her guests there.

Maude's sleep that night is 'disturbed by dreams of ice floes and retreating figures far off in a frozen landscape'. In the morning she receives a postcard from her London neighbour, as well as a letter from her housekeeper, including the line, 'It is a lovely baby. I wish you could see him.' Noting that she had forgotten about the Parkers, Maude tears the letter into fragments, and later spends a few pleasant hours sitting in the sun with Frances. After lunch Maude is summoned to see Charles Handel.

Charles finds Maude gazing at his Botticelli, and wishes to talk to her about her taste in paintings:

> For a moment I thought that I must have misheard him. His eyes were fixed solemnly on mine and his tone was lugubrious, as if he were a priest about to reprove a sinner.
>
> I recovered myself quickly, however. Paintings had been the passion of his long life; paintings, and what he had said of them, had drawn him up from the poverty of his youth into a world of luxury and beauty culminating in Belair; painting and paintings were to him what the memory of my dead was to me: the centre of life. Yes, I could understand.

Frances has told Charles that Maude does not care for contemporary painting; he seeks to open her eyes. Looking at Maude 'with a pathetic, haughty glare', Charles insists she accept his authority before she leaves.

The following day Maude is to go sight-seeing in the Vercors with Lionel; she has been reading a book about its history – apparently M.R.D. Foot's *SOE in France: An Account of the Work of the British Special Operations Executive in France 1940–44.* Yet it is Frances who appears instead, 'vaguely raffish in trousers and a headscarf'. Maude feels Frances's open, scarlet car is 'a young woman's car; potentially dangerous, ultra-modern, and, I must admit, rakishly attractive'.

When they stop for lunch, Frances announces, 'We've got to have it out.' For the last fifty years she has been writing to Maude, who has systematically destroyed all of her letters without opening them. The underlying issue, as Frances sees it, amounts to nothing more than a few kisses that she exchanged with Maude's brothers many years ago. In the end the two women drink a toast to their renewed relationship, and Maude even takes over the driving, since Frances has had several brandies.

As Maude drives, Frances proposes to relate 'what's been happening to me for the last fifty years'. She has been married three times and has a

daughter she cannot stand, as well as a grandson who has not spoken to her since he was seventeen. Maude's opinion of Frances begins to change; she now remembers 'how none of my brothers had ever shown signs, of caring *deeply* for Frances. […] I had been fighting on their behalf when there had been no need […].' She starts to feel sorry for her friend and observes that 'Frances's life at seventy seemed to be made up, so far as I could see, of three or four situations that could not change. All were painful, and all involved resentment or jealousy. I began to wonder if she were not lonely and unhappy, behind the hard façade?'

On their return they park the car and then make the 'impressive, hateful, death-white ascent' to the Handels' house for tea. Frances snaps that 'No-one's all right at Belair.' In an amusing moment of self-referentiality on the author's part, her narrator Maude comments that the phrase is 'like there always having been Starkadders at Cold Comfort'.

Charles Handel is taken ill and Maude, Frances, Lionel and Laurette, Charles's American daughter-in-law, are made to wait on the terrace in case he calls for one of them. Maude watches the light dying off the summits of the Chartreuse:

> They are the most unearthly-looking mountains I have ever seen. I suppose it is the fact that their whiteness is not snow, and that one doesn't, on one's first sight of them, know *what* it is which gives this impression. The big snow mountains are a familiar, if an awesome and poetic, sight, but the heights of the Chartreuse have a beauty that is unfamiliar, because it seems spiritual.
>
> There I sat, in company with two worldlings and an adulteress, between sacred and profane love as typified by the Chartreuse and the Vercors; and my feelings were with the men who had been martyred for France, but my spirit was drawn, unwillingly, to those heights above the hidden valley where the monks live.

Maude's attraction to the heights where the Carthusian monks live recalls Daphne Du Maurier's narrator John's planned stay at La Grande Trappe. According to an account of the monastic life that Daphne read and liked, the asceticism and devotion to silence of the Trappists 'was second in severity only to that of the Carthusians'.

As they wait for news of Charles, Frances comments, 'What he'd like is to have us all hanging on gasping until he […] *pops off*.' Given that they are enjoying Charles's hospitality, Maude objects to Frances's remark. Although Maude personally detests modern art, she admires Charles's climb from

complete obscurity to world fame. Frances also admires Charles's cleverness but makes the point that he's 'sucked everyone dry'; he is 'surrounded by maimed personalities'. She takes herself to the cinema in Grenoble, hoping that 'it'll be over by the time she gets back'.

Tullins with the Chartreuse and the Vercors mountains

Charles dies that evening, and his visitors prepare to disperse. Maude is persuaded to stay two more days until Charles's will has been read. She packs a lunch for herself and spends a delightful, serene day alone:

> I found a farm that did not seem to have changed in the last hundred years; I got into talk with a boy herding sheep under a great oak tree; I watched a *troupeau*, or mixed procession of sheep, goats and cows, come down from the pastures through the late afternoon light in charge of a girl who looked like a gipsy, in full cotton skirt and corsair's head-scarf; I found a rare orchid; and sauntered down through the woods into Belair as the clock in the village was striking seven. I felt bathed in sunlight and clear air, and my eyes were soothed by the old and beautiful things I had seen, and I was at peace.

On her return, Maude learns the contents of Charles's will. Belair is to become a museum and Lionel is to direct it. Charles has also left something

for Maude: two Picasso drawings, late ones. Considering her last conversation with the great man, she is not entirely surprised by the bequest.

In a key passage, Lionel then takes the opportunity to reveal that Charles's 'entire reputation [was] based on a "lie in the soul" as big as this house', because 'he thought modern art the greatest swindle ever brought off at the expense of the public':

> He was a marvellous conjuror, and he built up that terrific edifice of criticism, with that wonderful and ludicrous nonsense of a vocabulary, with genius. That's the word for it. It was genius. He was a genius. What he really adored, what he really believed to be great, were Botticelli and Titian. And now what we've all got to do is to take damned good care no-one ever finds out.

Maude's only comment is that she will give the Picasso drawings to the Tate. She feels 'dreadfully sad': 'This revelation, coming at the end of a day spent amidst scenes which had refreshed and rebuilt my spirit, struck me with doubled, trebled, pain. And shame, shame for poor Charles's weakness and greed. I felt that I could hardly bear it.'

The next morning Lionel leaves Belair with Charles's widow and daughter-in-law. Frances will drive Maude as far as Orly airport. From Orly, Maude heads toward the village north of Paris where two of her brothers are buried:

> My own two graves were side by side, in the last row given over to the English. My father had seen to it that the crosses were of marble, and below Jock's name and his age (His age. Twenty-two.) – had caused to be engraved the refrain of *Lightheart* –
>
> *But Lightheart, O, Lightheart, when will you come again?*
>
> I suppose it could be said that Jock had had the lightest heart of the three, but I had never wanted the line to be added to the stone. The poem had at one time been known throughout the Western world, and had brought tourists to gaze at Jock's grave: I could never think of that vulgar curiosity without a frightening anger.

The poem that angers Maude contains a poignant echo of the phrase 'A light heart lives long' from *Love's Labour's Lost*.

The guardian tells Maude that another Englishwoman has been coming to the cemetery every summer to place flowers on the two graves. From the guardian's description, Maude realises it is Frances: 'Yes, I knew Frances; had known her for more than fifty years; and it appeared I had never known her at all.'

RETURN TO LONDON

At home in Highgate, Maude feels Belair seems remote:

> I had been in a place where everything surrounding me – the landscape, the house, the gardens – were beautiful, and only the moral climate ugly and false. Now England had taken possession of me again; familiar, ugly, noisy, cosy England.

Millie has made bouquets of flowers for Maude's homecoming and brings her up to date on Mrs Parker and her baby. Maude feels there is something unusual in her expression: 'As I bent to smell the jasmine and the salmon-pink sweet peas and feathery wild grass, I suddenly knew what it was in her expression that had been puzzling me; she had looked at me as if we were equals.'

Maude ponders over Lionel's identification of Charles's 'lie in the soul' and concludes that it now leaves her indifferent: 'I just found myself fond of Lionel, and fond of the Charles of my memories. And that was all. Reason and justice continued to give me their verdicts, and old acquaintance tossed them aside as if they no longer mattered.'

Millie invites Teddie Parker and her young son Eric to tea, and Maude agrees to join them. Overlooking the fact that she initially met Teddie immediately before the birth of her son, Maude comments that 'this was the first that I had met a girl of the working-classes socially, and the first time that she had had tea with a lady'. Teddie and Eric come all the way from their council house in East London. Maude reflects that 'it went off well enough':

> The girl is strikingly unlike what I had decided she would be like, and strikingly individual. Interesting, too, I should think. But I'm old and I'm tired, I don't want to get involved with interesting young people.

She is relieved to think 'that's the end of the Parkers so far as I am concerned'.

And yet, Millie tells her,

> '… Teddie won't rest now, miss until *you've* been over to tea with *her*. Very nice manners, Teddie has. Not one for taking all and giving nothing. She was at the Hilda Marshall Grammar School for Girls. A very good school, it is; everybody speaks well of it. You … you will go if she asks you, won't you, miss?'

Maude stalks into the house without answering and plays a 'storm of Liszt'.

Since her visit to the war cemetery, Maude's picture of Frances has also changed:

> At Belair, I had decided that I must accept her as she still was, faults and distasteful habits and all, because it had been such a relief to lose at least one of the situations rooted in the past which gave me so much pain.
>
> But at [the cemetery] I had learned that she was faithful, and that she possessed a heart; and now I could feel gratitude and affection, as well as the half-century old fascination. And a little jealousy too? – oh, yes, a little jealousy. She had found the courage to go to *their* graves when I lacked it.

Maude now feels that her own grief had been selfish, and had caused fresh suffering to her parents:

> They had lost three children, and the fourth was turning into a kind of frozen *thing*, a Snow-Woman, as Frances had called me, a creature crouching behind barriers of pain and pride; icy walls mile-high and so thick that the faint cries for help from her father and mother could not reach her.
>
> I used to despise them for showing the world their grief. Yes, I used to do that. I was bitterly angry – always in silence – with my father for writing the poem '*Lightheart*', only seeing how it laid open our loss to strangers' eyes all over the world – for it had been translated into many languages – and never realizing the reconciliation, small but real, which it must have brought to him, and to others; how it must have kept memories in hearts unknown to me fresh and green; full of pain, but alive.
>
> *But Lightheart, O, Lightheart, when will you come again?*

Maude begins reading Frances's monthly letters and enjoying them, instead of throwing them away unread. They now correspond regularly.

In August, Maude receives an invitation from Teddie. Teddie's address, as well as her signature, contain clues to her parentage and the ending of the novel:

14 Brotherton Close
Rothbury

Dear Miss Barrington,

Ronald and I and Eric would be very pleased if you and Millie could come over to tea next Sunday. The front garden is looking smashing and we would like you to see it.

Millie knows the way. Please come at three o'clock.

Yours sincerely,

E. Parker.

Maude learns from Millie that the 'E.' of Teddie's signature stands for Edna.

Maude and Millie take a bus, a train and another bus to Rothbury:

> Mile after mile of low new houses, their stucco already darkened by the smoke from the squat, clumping factories, each set in its municipal-style garden of clipped sooty grass and staring flowers. Flashy shops, and occasionally an isolated group of cottages that must have been nearer two hundred than a hundred years old; roofs sagging, windows dark and glaring where louts had smashed the glass, and through it all cut the broad, featureless road made for motorists, arched over by those terrible lamps that throw out their shadowless glare at the hour which was once twilight.

Teddie and Eric come to meet their guests and accompany them to the house.

The Parkers' living room belongs to the new world:

> Everything was blue or a clear scarlet. The walls and ceiling were sky blue, the plain carpet the scarlet of a guardsman's coat. A small central table had been lacquered blue, and it was set with cups of scarlet plastic. The half curtains at the windows were blue; the thicker ones the same strident red.

> I lay back, remembering Proust's description of the theme in music that is like a cock crowing in the scarlet dawn, and felt too old and too tired for the headlong youth blazoned out in that tiny room. Nothing was old; nothing was quiet; nothing was made of stone or metal or natural ancient wood. As irrevocably as Charles Handel's house in France, it belonged to the new world that was coming, just as I belonged to the old.

The Parkers' 'telly' is kept upstairs, leading Maude to explain that for various reasons she doesn't own one:

> […] I read, and I practise the piano, and one hasn't time for everything. Also, a great deal of the singing and the modern music, both popular and serious, literally hurts my ear drums. And I dislike the shallowness of the discussions between 'personalities', and the general smoothing out and streamlining of topics and problems which are full of insoluble difficulties.

Maude neglects to go on, feeling she has been pontificating. The young couple and the house itself surprise her: 'Perhaps it was just that I was unused to the manners of young married working-class people. I must remember that these were the first of their kind that I had known.' On the way home Maude admits to Millie that she enjoyed her visit but is troubled by one thing: 'Are they hoping to get something out of me?', she asks. Millie persuades her that the Parkers like her for herself.

When Frances visits London for a fortnight, she and Maude see each other once again. Maude suggests going to a popular musical, but Frances explodes, 'Oh, God, not a *musical* […]. Aren't there any French films on?' For the next two weeks Maude leaves home every morning by eleven and goes to bed after midnight, swept up by Frances into a whirlwind of lunches, theatre, cinemas, alcohol and new clothes.

On the last evening, Frances comments:

> 'You know that song of Cole Porter's; "I get a kick out of you",' she said abruptly, between two bolted mouthfuls of unfattening salad, 'it's like that with you and me. You're a prig, and we don't agree about a thing, do we?… well, you know we don't … and you're dreary, Snow-Woman. But *somehow*, we've managed to have fun.' Her tone was not questioning; it stated a fact.

In a different tone, Frances concludes that ‘The Snow-Woman’s beginning to melt.’ As it happens, this is the last time the two women are together.

The morning after Frances leaves, Maude and Millie learn from a newspaper article that Ronald, Teddie’s husband, has disappeared. Maude gives the following account of an episode in Ronald’s work life that vaguely recalls the plot of the 1960 film *The Angry Silence*:

> I have always found the details of industrial life so tedious that I have never bothered to master their vocabulary, but I managed to gather, in spite of poor Millie now crying loudly and distractingly beside me, that a sum, based on overtime earnings, had been demanded from a number of the men at Glovers [the factory that employs Ronald] by their Union, as a contribution to a shop fund; that they had refused to pay it and had been fined by the shop stewards; that a number had still at first refused to pay but had afterwards agreed to do so on being threatened with expulsion from the Union, and that Ronald Parker alone had held out.
>
> This had all started some two weeks ago, just at the time that Frances had arrived in England and swept me up into a fortnight of ceaseless expensive activity.
>
> The Union had expelled him, and the rest of the men had unanimously voted among themselves to send him to Coventry. He had continued to work.

Ronald is later found dead, a suicide at age twenty-one after having been sent to Coventry by his fellow workers.

EDNA'S SECRET

Maude does her best to calm Millie and the next morning, over tea, Millie tells her that her own son George, an army lieutenant, was killed at Dunkirk when he was the same age as Ronald. Millie had initially been hired as the Barringtons' scullery maid but left the family in 1918 to marry. She returned as a widow in the early 1950s, and they employed her as housekeeper. Millie remained with Maude after the death of her parents, and Maude had always assumed that the housekeeper's son had died as a baby.

Millie explains that George married young and that his wife had died not long after he did, leaving a baby girl: Teddie. She has never mentioned this to Maude because she thought Maude would not like it. To Maude, this new information 'explains everything'. She feels that it's lovely for Millie to have a granddaughter and suggests inviting Teddie and her son for a visit. As she waits for them to arrive, Maude struggles to accept the situation: 'If I hadn't had a strong feeling of happiness at the thought of seeing the little boy in his bath, and asleep in Jock's room – almost as if he had been Jock's son – I would have been dismayed indeed.'

When Teddie arrives, she thanks Maude for having her and warns that the papers may be a nuisance for a couple of days. She goes out for the afternoon leaving Eric with Millie. Maude finds her very self-assured and comments to Millie that 'She's behaving as if she were a young cousin or a niece of mine … it's quite the easiest way.' Millie responds by giving Maude 'the oddest imploring glance'. Maude takes up *The Times*, 'but after ten minutes with it I ceased to study a detailed account of the progress made in the law relating to abortion over the last century, with which the editor of their Women's Page had seen fit to brace her surely already braced readers'.

A reporter rings and asks Maude what she thought of Ronald's fellow-workers sending him to Coventry. She repeats Teddie's words, 'Cowardly and un-English':

> He tried to get me to say more, seeing, I imagine, an eminently printable 'story' with a class-war angle; asked me if I had private means and owned my house, and what I thought of The Beatles, drug-taking

> and so on; he also asked my age. I told him that he must pursue his enquiries elsewhere, and rang off.

Millie gives Maude a short lesson on how to feed the baby:

> It was a new world, and I found it fascinating. I know that sounds laughable, but it must be remembered that, for the first time in my life, my mother-instinct was being fed. I know now that, had it ever been developed, it would have been very strong – perhaps too strong. And I was under the spell, too, of the red gold head and the clear, staring slate-blue eyes […].

Maude learns from a neighbour that the short interview with her appears on the newspaper's front page, 'describing me as a typical unmarried English gentlewoman of the old school, in her early seventies'.

On the day of Ronald's funeral, Maude volunteers to stay home to take care of Eric. Then Millie is called away for a few weeks, to see her sister who is in hospital. Edna, as Maude now calls Teddie, offers to cook for her and takes her own dinner in the kitchen where she likes to read; Maude does the same in the dining room. Maude is reading *Westward Ho!* for the fourteenth or fifteenth time; she notices *The Valley of the Dolls* on the kitchen dresser. Maude reflects, 'My time with Eric and his mother had been the happiest I had known for years.' One evening Edna lingers after bringing in Maude's omelette. She proposes to come back after the washing-up and leaves Maude reading Susan Warner's *Queechy* – apparently about a faultless heroine – 'for the ninth or so time'.

Later, Edna comes in with brandy and enquires, 'You don't know why I was called Edna, do you?' Maude has a question of her own: 'And *why* […] *why* did you allow Mr Crozier to bring you here, when you knew that your baby might be born at any minute?' Edna replies that 'We were going to tell you, but the baby started and we – Lionel and me, we lost our heads […]. I *am* your niece – at least, I'm your great-niece. I'm your brother Edward's grand-daughter, darling.' Edward and Millie's son George – Edna's father – had been conceived during Edward's last leave in 1918, just before he was killed at Maubeuge.

Lionel and Frances Crozier had kept in touch with Millie during her absence from the Barringtons' and helped support her granddaughter. After learning the full story and recovering from the state of shock in which it leaves her, Maude comments: 'What was tearing at me was the fact of their […] half-century of silence. They had condemned me – us, for my parents

were involved of course as well – to years and years of the equivalent of "the dry pan and the gradual fire".' Maude wonders why they never told her: '*Because*, darling, […] you were so – frozen up and inhibited and shut-in and all the rest of it, they thought it would kill you to know, coming on the top of – everything else.'

In those days, Edna continues, 'people were brought up to make such a *fuss* about that sort of thing'. Yet, Maude's narration concedes, 'Even now, even in the midst of my sacred joy in the fact that Edward's blood had not been wasted in the soil of France but flowed on in two living creatures more beautiful and more lasting than poppies, I thought *She was our kitchenmaid*. The bonds of class, for my generation are bonds of steel.' Edna has seen a letter saying that her grandfather had planned to marry Millie.

By ostracising Frances for her youthful flirtation with the Barrington brothers and by her fifty-year refusal to even open Frances's letters, Maude ultimately condemned both herself and her parents to what she now likens to torture. Her holiday in France, leading to the resumption of her friendship with Frances, allows her to acknowledge what amounts to her own 'lie of the soul'. On returning home, Maude gradually escapes her self-imposed restraints and discovers new objects of attachment in 'familiar, ugly, noisy, cosy England'.

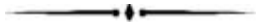
Frances dies suddenly in the summer that Edna comes to stay with Maude:

> Sometimes I read again the letter that she wrote to me in reply to mine thanking her for what she had done for me, and I smile with pain and affection over its most Frances-like conclusion: '*And for God's sake don't make a fuss about it now, it was all a hundred years ago anyway. Hooray, the old Snow-Woman's gone for good*.'

The Snow-Woman may be gone for good, but Maude would not be Maude if she had nothing to complain about:

> Millie *does* continue to irritate me. She looks ten years younger, and I really think she has ceased to be afraid of me, though I must confess that my sisterly feelings were sorely tried on the day that she faltered out that she 'couldn't never manage Maude, but I might manage "Maudie", miss, it seems friendlier-like'.
>
> So, occasionally, I answer to 'Maudie'. No doubt it is good for me to be chastened.

On the novel's last page Maude admits that '[a]s the years have gone by' Christianity has come into her life, although she still regrets that Christians 'were never told that life was not unbearably sad, only that out of the sadness a richness and a glory grow – if not here, then in one of the unimaginable countries'.



The Greengage Summer, *The Nutmeg Tree* and *The Scapegoat* are set in different periods and evolved out of quite different circumstances, but there is an underlying structural similarity between them. Each one portrays a mostly female family group that is temporarily or permanently separated from a husband and father. And in France, in each case, a temporary or possibly permanent substitute presents himself. *The Scapegoat* is unique in that it is narrated by the vacationing Englishman, while the unsuspecting family he joins temporarily is French.

In London, Stella Gibbons's narrator, Maude, is also surrounded by a small, mostly female family group but, before travelling to France and beginning to 'melt', she is wholly unaware of the true nature of the relationships in question. Her 'thaw' is initiated not by a substitute father or husband, but by her old school friend Frances Crozier, fond of French films and suspected of having Spanish or Italian blood.

At the military cemetery of St Vaast-aux-Puits – an apparently made-up name suggesting the English phrase 'vast pits' – where two of her brothers are buried, Maude revises her opinion of Frances. She also begins to appreciate the 'small, but real' reconciliation with loss that her father achieved by writing and publishing the poem *Lightheart*, and having it engraved on his son's tombstone.

AFTERWORD:
NOVELS OF 1969

The Snow-Woman came out in May 1969 with very little notice in the press. The second half of the year saw the publication of Daphne Du Maurier's *The House on the Strand*, Rumer Godden's *In This House of Brede*, and Margery Sharp's *Rosa*. These three novels do not contain a French interlude, yet they bear comparison to *The Snow-Woman* in that in each case the main character tries to accommodate him or herself with the past.

In 1965, the lease of Menabilly, where Daphne Du Maurier and her family had lived for almost a quarter of century, was coming to an end. Frederick Browning died that year and in his last weeks he and Daphne signed a new lease for Kilmarth, Menabilly's dower house. Kilmarth would eventually become her new home and within a few years of her husband's death Daphne began to think of a new novel set in and around it.

Kilmarth is located near the village of Tywardreath, meaning 'house on the beach' in Cornish. A local historian's research into Tywardreath's manor and priory would be one source for her new novel, *The House on the Strand*. Kilmarth dated back to 1329 and was therefore centuries older than Menabilly, and its previous tenant was another source of inspiration. Dr Charles Singer, who died in 1960, was Professor of the History of Science at University College in London; he and his wife Dorothea were prominent medical historians. When Dr Singer was translating Galen's *On Anatomical Procedures*, he had hired Richard Gilbert West, a young scientist, to dissect monkey embryos at Kilmarth.

Daphne wondered in a letter:

> […] [W]hat if that old Professor Singer and his wife, with their embryos in bottles, got up to queer discoveries? I looked them up in *Who's Who* and they used to know about Alchemy, so I thought – what if they found some secret way of going back to the past? And suddenly I began to see the whole countryside in a fourteenth-century way, and

> the sea roaring up past Par, and touching Tywardreath and the Priory above […].

The young scientist remembered Dr Singer as a kindly, avuncular man.

In *The House on the Strand*, however, Kilmarth belongs to the forty-five-year-old scientist Magnus A. Lane, initials M.A.L., suggesting the word 'male' and meaning 'evil' in the author's second language, French. The novel is narrated by Richard Young, called Dick, a friend of Magnus since their student days: 'We happened to meet in the same pew one evening at King's College when a carol service was in progress.'

Du Maurier pointed out in her memoir that *The Scapegoat*, *The House on the Strand* and three of her other novels featured first person narration by someone of the masculine gender, and 'each of my five narrators depended, for reassurance, on a male friend older than himself'. In particular, 'John, in *The Scapegoat*, gained confidence only when he acted as double for Jean de Gué.' In *The House on the Strand*, the last of these five novels, 'Richard […] was obedient to the instructions of his scientist friend and mentor Magnus, and was thus transported into the fourteenth century.'

At the beginning of *The Scapegoat*, the Comte drugs the oblivious John; similarly, in *The House on the Strand*, Magnus tempts Dick into experimenting with the drug he has discovered. The Comte has both a wife and a mistress or two, while John lives alone. In the later novel Magnus is unattached, while Dick has been married for three years to Vita, an American with two sons from a previous marriage. Dick has recently resigned from his publishing job in London, and Magnus has loaned him his family home in Cornwall – the house on the strand – for the summer. Vita hopes Dick will agree to relocate to New York.

Dick tries the 'drug that keeps sending him back to the past, and he becomes a sort of addict to the switchback', as Daphne explained in a letter:

> He just can't stop, and his wife can't think what is the matter with him, and imagines he is drinking, or has some woman on the side. And all the time he is obsessed with this past which he keeps getting into, and the family of that time, who are having fearful problems of their own. He is much more interested in *their* problems, than his wife's rather tiresome ones. I think I shall make her rather maddening and social, wanting people for weekends, just when he wants to give himself a 'fix', to get back to 1327!

To Dick, the drug 'proved that the past was living still, that we were all participants, all witnesses. I was Robert, I was Bodrugan, I was Cain; and in being so was more truly myself.'

Towards the end of the novel, Magnus travels to Cornwall to join Dick, but is killed by a passing train shortly after disembarking to pursue a drug-induced trip into the past. When the police find Magnus's body, they return his wallet and walking-stick to the narrator. Dick decides he will start using the stick, which 'was the last thing that Magnus had ever held in his hands':

> I remember the collection at the flat. There had been a gun-stick and a sword-stick, a stick with a telescope at one end, and another with a bird's head on the handle. This one was comparatively simple, with the usual silver knob on top, engraved with Commander Lane's [Magnus's father's] initials. He had been the originator of the craze for family walking-sticks, and vaguely I had a recollection of him showing me this particular example, long ago, when I was staying at Kilmarth. It contained some gadget, I had forgotten what, but by pressing the knob down a spring was released. I tried it; nothing happened. I tried it again and then twisted the knob, and something clicked. I unwound the knob and it came away in my hands, and revealed a minute silver-lined measure, just large enough to hold a half-dram of spirit or other liquid. The measure had been wiped clean, probably by a tissue thrown away or buried when Magnus set off upon his last walk, but I knew now, with absolute certainty, what it must have contained.

As previously discussed, Daphne's enquiry into French family history was the starting point for *The Scapegoat* and here the motif of the walking-stick also constitutes a fairly obvious reference to her actor father Gerald.

According to a contemporary journalist's article in the *Strand Magazine*, Gerald Du Maurier owned 'a huge quiverful' of walking-sticks:

> They are set on a frame beside the front door like a row of elongated butterflies on pins. Sticks of cane, and of ebony, and of fine woods ravished from exotic isles. Sticks with gold tops, silver tops, bone tops, amber tops. Sticks of all girths and all complexions. […] They are real, honest-to-goodness sticks for walking with, pretty well all of a height, with birth and breeding in the crook of their handles or the contour of their knobs. […] [T]here is a deadly secret about each. I have watched many a less interesting music-hall turn than du Maurier uncorking the genie that each stick holds. Click! – and one of them is a flashing rapier.

> Another is a camouflaged rifle. A third contains a Georgian whip. Touch a hidden button on a fourth and the stick falls in two, leaving you with the most vicious-looking weapon of attack that 'Sapper' ever devised for his most fearsome thick-ear story.

The plural of the French 'mal' – as in the initials of Magnus A. Lane – is 'maux', phonetically identical to the initial syllable of 'Maurier', suggesting that Daphne connected the 'double life' made possible by Magnus's drug with her paternal heritage.

Magnus has left Kilmarth and its contents to Dick, who feels that in death Magnus 'had become part of that separate world I knew, the world of [the fourteenth-century figure] Roger [Kylmerth], of Isolda'. When the cremation service is over, Dick takes another dose of the drug he has hidden in Magnus's walking-stick. Transported back into the fourteenth century, he finds Roger Kylmerth, the owner of Kilmarth, rescuing Isolda from imprisonment by her husband.

As Isolda puts her hand in Roger's,

> […] I felt as if it were in mine as well, and that the pair of us were lifting, dragging her through the fallen snow, and he was no longer a steward bound in the service of another woman and I a phantom from a later world, but both of us were men sharing a common purpose and a common love that neither of us, in his time or mine, would ever dare make plain.

The feeling ends abruptly when Dick is almost hit by a train, just as Magnus was.

Returning home to rest, Dick reflects:

> I knew now, to the fullest extent, what it felt like to lead what is called a 'double life'. The walking-stick, the bottles locked in the suitcase, were like keys to some woman's flat, to be used when opportunity offered; but more tempting still, and more insidious, was the secret knowledge that the woman herself might be under my own roof, even now, tonight, in her own time.

Dick falls asleep thinking of the loft at Kilmarth, which now belongs to him, and where, in the fourteenth century, Isolda would have slept. He is awakened by the word 'Darling …':

> It was Vita bending over me, fantasy and confusion combining to make her other than she was, and when I pulled her down beside me it was not the living woman and my wife whom I held but the phantom one I sought and who I knew, in reality and the present, never could respond. Presently, when I opened my eyes – for I must have dozed off for a while – she was sitting on the stool before the dressing-table, smothering her face with cream.
>
> 'Well,' she said smiling, looking at me in the glass, 'if that's the way you celebrate your inheritance of this place I'm all for it.'
>
> The towel, wrapped turban-fashion round her head, and the mask of cream gave her a clown-like appearance, and suddenly I felt revolted by the puppet world in which I found myself, and desired no part of it, neither now, nor tomorrow, nor at any time. I wanted to vomit. I got out of bed and said, 'I'm going to sleep in the dressing-room.'

The reversal is complete: Dick seeks the fourteenth-century phantom Isolda who can never respond; his actual wife Vita is nothing more than a clown-like figure in a puppet world.

On a subsequent 'trip', Dick mistakes Vita for one of the dream figures and awakens to find himself attempting to strangle her. He consults the local doctor, who endorses Vita's suggestion of a family holiday in Ireland. Dick packs his bag and accompanies his family to the airport, but then fails to board the airplane, which takes off without him. He sings as he heads instead for Bodmin Moor 'like a homing pigeon', aware that he is 'safe from pursuit': Vita 'could not reach me now'. He reflects that the 'single draught in the walking-stick could guarantee re-entry to my world, but not what I should find there when I did'.

When Dick spots the village doctor at the exact location on the moor that he had described to him, he unscrews the bottle hidden in the walking-stick and swallows its contents. The doctor has come to share Dick's curiosity about the fourteenth-century intrigues, and he informs Dick about the chemist's report: 'the drug contains a substance of some toxicity that could seriously affect the central nervous system, possibly leading to paralysis'. He is unaware that Dick was still in possession of the one remaining dose and has in fact just swallowed it. Suddenly the drug takes effect: the doctor follows Dick's movements until it wears off.

Afterwards Dick returns to Kilmarth, and when the telephone rings, he ponders what excuse he should make to Vita, now that 'it's all over and [he is] free'. But the receiver slips from his hand and crashes to the floor. Things do seem to be 'all over' and Dick is indeed 'free' – not free to join Vita, but

free in the sense that he is dead. Du Maurier had concocted a not very welcoming 'housewarming' for what turned out to be her last home; at least *The House on the Strand* sold well. Within a month of publication, Daphne was made a Dame of the British Empire. According to her friend Oriel, 'She accepted this with her usual diffidence, pleased and honoured, but it could not make her take herself, or it, any more seriously.'

Daphne's sister, Jeanne, had recently been presented with Augustus John's portrait of their father Gerald, leading Daphne to comment in reply to a friend who congratulated her on her DBE, 'I wish I had the portrait and [Jeanne] had been made the Dame!'

The ending of *The House on the Strand* contrasts with the more hopeful ending of *The Scapegoat*, in which both the Comte and his English *remplaçant* abandon their guns. Will Comte Jean de Gué pursue John's efforts to improve the lives of his family members? Will John himself find out 'what to do with love' at the Abbaye de la Grande Trappe?

In their concluding pages, *The Scapegoat* and *The Snow-Woman* make reference to the religious impulse that in each case the narrator shares with the author; in Rumer Godden's novel, *In This House of Brede*, religion is the main concern. Already in *The Greengage Summer*, Godden's adolescent alter ego, Cecil Grey, fancied calling herself 'Cecil de Courcy, de Haviland, Cecil du Guesclin, Winnington-Withers … Winter. That was a beautiful name, and I thought, I shall use it when I am a writer, or a nun; Cecil Winter, Sister Cecilia Winter; but I was not yet a writer, or a nun, nor did I know that I should ever be either.'

When asked why she wanted to write a book about the religious life, Rumer Godden answered, 'Because nuns are dramatic. Theirs is the greatest love story in the world.' Godden began moving toward Roman Catholicism in the 1950s; her elder daughter, Jane, became a Catholic in 1956 and Rumer was received by an archbishop the following year. However, since both she and her husband had been married before and their former spouses were still living, she could not take communion.

In 1960, Rumer Godden became concerned about her daughter's pregnancy; a friend suggested she write to Stanbrook Abbey to ask the nuns for their prayers. After her granddaughter's birth, Rumer and her husband James went to Stanbrook to thank the nuns, which led to the novelist's thirty-year friendship with Dame Felicitas Corrigan. (Godden explains that 'Benedictine nuns of the English Congregation, if they belong to an enclosed or contemplative Order, are called Dame not the usual sister'.)

According to the novelist, it was a remark by Dame Felicitas, herself the author of several books and a friend of Catholic converts Siegfried Sassoon

and Alec Guinness, that led her to write *In This House of Brede*:

> 'I wish,' said Dame Felicitas, 'that someone would write a book about nuns as they really are, not as the author wants them to be.'
>
> I thought of *Black Narcissus* and blushed.

Rumer Godden's third novel, *Black Narcissus*, had been written in 1938. She recalled in her memoir:

> Long, long before this when I was, I think, eighteen years old and we were in Shillong, we went on a picnic to nearby Cherrapunji, a deserted cantonment on a plateau, high above the surrounding gorges. I wandered away from the others and going down a steep little path came upon a grave; it was marked only by a small headstone in the shape of a cross with a name, 'Sister …' and two dates; she had died when she was only twenty-three.

The novelist's blush conceded that everything else about the nuns in *Black Narcissus* was pure invention.

Although Godden herself always 'lived in the world', she did eventually become an oblate. As she explains it,

> St Benedict is described as 'the leader and master of a countless multitude of souls'. This multitude is made up, not only of monks and nuns, but also of people living in the world and sharing in the spiritual life of the monasteries by an act of 'self-oblation' prompted by the desire for spiritual perfection and union with God. For Oblates a symbolic scapular – simply two small tabs, white on black joined by a black ribbon – represents the religious habit and they wear it secretly as a constant reminder of what they have undertaken.

For this new novel the author planned to adopt the suggestion of Dame Felicitas: she based it on a series of interviews with the Stanbrook nuns. She promised the Abbess not to ask any personal questions of the nuns, but in fact

> […] I did not have to; they told me everything I needed to know and more, stories, happenings, far more strange than anything I could have thought of in fiction. My greatest difficulty was in not betraying to any nun things another nun had told me – what is said in the parlour is a

> secret as in the confessional, not even the Abbess knows what is said there.

According to a nun in the novel, 'Our Abbess, we believe, is the representative of Christ – God – it is in her name "Abbess" from "Abba", Father. That is why we hold her in such reverence […].' Godden's novel transferred Stanbrook from Worcester, where it was located at the time, to East Sussex, where she was living for most of the five years it took her to write it; Brede was the name of a nearby town.

The novel covers the years 1954 to 1968 and deals with about two dozen major characters. Godden describes her subject as follows: '*In This House of Brede* is the story of Dame Philippa Talbot […] told from the day of her entry into the enclosed life of the monastic Abbey of Brede.' The novel opens on New Year's Day 1954. The setting is the office of 'the mighty woman' Philippa Talbot, who, it is rumoured, is about to be selected for the vacant Controller post at the Ministry of Trade and Information in central London (after the war, Godden's husband James worked for the Central Office of Information).

Philippa is a forty-two-year-old widow who lives in a flat in Highgate with her housekeeper and a Siamese cat. One of her admiring employees, nineteen-year-old Penny, describes her as 'special', 'marvellous', 'groomed'. Penny is shocked when she learns that New Year's Day is in fact Mrs Talbot's last day of work, not because she has been promoted to Controller, but because she is leaving the Ministry to become an enclosed nun. Philippa locks up her flat and takes the train to Brede, where she downs three double whiskies before entering the Abbey.

As the novel unfolds the reader learns Philippa was born in Japan and lived there until she was twelve; she later took a first in languages at Oxford. During the Second World War Philippa was transferred to Washington, DC and travelled there with her son and his nurse; her husband was later killed in the war. On returning to London, she has and then ends a relationship with Sir Richard Taft, a married man with children who is also the Permanent Secretary at the head of her department.

About five years after Philippa has left London for the abbey, her former employee Penny comes to see her because she is pregnant and she knows her husband feels they cannot yet afford to have children. Penny leaves the abbey reassured that she should go through with her pregnancy anyway. A week later, however, Penny's husband, Donald, calls on Philippa himself, because his wife is haemorrhaging as a result of the abortion he has persuaded her to have. During their interview he receives a telephone call

alerting him that Penny has been hospitalised. Philippa organises a prayer vigil, and fortunately Penny recovers. She and Donald go on to have two children, including a girl named for Philippa.

Philippa has a difficult time adjusting to life at the abbey, losing weight and particularly missing baths and cigarettes. The other nuns notice that she does not share their 'love of and interest in children and babies'. She eventually confides to the Abbess that while she was living in America, her five-year-old son was killed in a tragic accident.

Because Dame Philippa speaks Japanese, the Abbess wishes to appoint her as zelatrix – a nun who monitors the behaviour of younger nuns – to the novitiate, which currently includes five Japanese postulants. Philippa feels she 'cannot be that', because she would then also be zelatrix to a young English postulant she particularly wants to avoid. Sister Polly, as the young postulant is called, happens to be the daughter of the nurse in whose charge Philippa's young son died.

An outbreak of chicken pox causes Philippa and Sister Polly to spend almost three weeks in one another's company. As a result of this experience, Philippa agrees to become zelatrix to the novitiate. A group of nuns are planning to set up a new religious establishment in Japan. When the prospective prioress dies suddenly, Philippa gradually accepts that she is best placed to accept the role of superior. As the novel ends, family and friends have gone to the airport to wave goodbye to the group leaving for Japan. Philippa waves to Penny and her husband but fails to even notice the presence of her former lover, Sir Richard Taft.

Rumer Godden dedicated the book to her husband, 'who has endured us for five years'. She and James had been married for twenty years, so the 'us' presumably refers to Rumer's interactions with the Stanbrook nuns whose stories inspired her. Inevitably, the novel is probably most compelling to those who share the author's religious faith.

The success of Margery Sharp's *Nutmeg Tree* led to a series of light and comical magazine stories continuing the adventures of 'good old Julia', who has since become Lady Warring [sic]. Six months after their marriage, she and Sir William go to live at his country home in Cockstead.

Sharp's 1969 novel, *Rosa* – also dedicated to her husband – opens on a midsummer night in Yorkshire; the reader eventually learns that the year is 1940. Old Lady Ramillies – Rosa – has come outside to take the air. The main feature of her pleasance is not a nutmeg tree but rather an alley of clipped laurel terminating in an enclave with a statue.

Rosa has been a widow for almost forty years, never remarrying due to the *dum vidua* clause in her late husband's will (although not *dum casta*, the

narrator specifies). Four children shout for Great-Aunt Rosa to sing her Spanish song again. The rest of the novel is an extended flashback that tells who Rosa is and how she became Lady Ramillies, as well as how the four children come to be with her in Yorkshire.

In the 1860s, Sir Charles Ramillies of the Hall – regularly referred to as 'His Lordship' by his tenants – had 'more or less sold into peonage' his head-groom, George Ison. For the salary of 20 *s* a week that Don Hernando, the president of an unnamed South American republic promises to pay him, Ison agrees to leave both Yorkshire and Peggy, the woman he has recently married, and to relocate to the new world.

In South America George acquires a common law wife, Mercedes, who gives birth to two children: Rosa and Pablo. During a period of political unrest George accidentally becomes a Hero of the Republic and a statue is made of him. He is particularly close to Rosa, whom he sends to a convent school where she perfects her English and learns to do needlework. The Yorkshire-born South American head-groom apparently shares Du Maurier's Comte de Gué's negative opinion of people who take religious vows:

> 'Don't ever let them make a nun o'thee,' said George Ison.
> 'Why not, papa?'
> 'It's not healthy,' said George vaguely.

When Rosa is fourteen, her father dies of malaria. Don Hernando, the now ex-President of the South American republic, takes responsibility for Ison's family. Since Rosa has no dowry, 'it occurred to Don Hernando that the best and indeed obvious thing for Rosa to become was a nun'; her mother accepts the suggestion. However, Rosa replies, 'my father would not wish it', and elaborates 'I gave him, you see, my promise; on his dying bed.' Don Hernando therefore writes to George's former employer, Sir Charles, in Yorkshire, informing him that Rosa is on her way. Rosa understands that she is going to make her home with 'a great English lord who was my father's friend …'.

In the opinion of the locals, on the other hand, Sir Charles's establishment 'was practically a successor to Medmenham Abbey', also known as the Hell-Fire Club, whose motto was 'Do what thou wilt'. Recalling the comic figure Gilbert Chalmers in Sharp's earlier novel, *Four Gardens*, Sir Charles has a passion for water:

> Part of his pleasure was to bathe naked; another, corollary, to alarm the maid coming across the lawn, or any female passer-by, by the

> possibility of a sudden complete emergence. If first his shoulders, then his torso, rose dripping with water weed, prudent young women hurried on, the more skittish squealed – but hurried on too. Locally this practice was reprobated as going beyond the bounds even of that eccentricity so common among the gentry as to have become permissible.

Since the death of Sir Charles's first wife, George Ison's legitimate wife Peggy has become his housekeeper and companion.

Sir Charles allows Rosa to come and live with him and his housekeeper, less out of charity than out of what the narrator calls *folie de rencontre*. For although Sir Charles initially intended to send Rosa to his widowed sister-in-law in London, 'It suddenly struck him that even more amusing than to put a cat amongst the pigeons in Mount Street would be to observe Mrs Peggy in unwitting contact with her husband's by-blow.'

Once in Yorkshire, Rosa del Ison is called Rosa Dennison. The false identity leads to a comedy, but comedies, Sir Charles points out, have a *dénouement*. The *dénouement* occurs the day that Peggy Ison remarks to Sir Charles: 'Thou should'st ha' told me […] [t]hat Miss was George's daughter.' Sir Charles is hoist with his own petard when he realises that Peggy, a widow herself since George Ison's death in South America, will keep the secret of Rosa's parentage on one condition only: he must agree to marry her, his housekeeper. Sir Charles sends at once for his worldly sister-in-law Mrs Ramillies, who pays Peggy to leave Yorkshire.

Because convent-educated Rosa feels she cannot live alone with an unmarried man, Miss Pomfret, an elderly cousin of Sir Charles's, comes to live with them. The three residents of the Hall get on well, except when Mrs Ramillies, the mother of the young heir Archy, comes to visit. Sir Charles eventually decides that his sister-in-law has gone too far. Although he is not attracted to Rosa, who is forty years younger than he, he marries her to free himself from his interfering sister-in-law: 'It was now that Rosa's long years of apprenticeship to patience and modesty and self-effacement, her refusal to become conspicuous in the hunting-field or to live at the Hall unchaperoned, had their reward.'

Sir Charles's man of business sees that Rosa is secured £1,000 a year and the occupancy of the Hall for life, provided that she does not remarry (*dum vidua*). And not long after marrying Rosa '[Sir Charles] and the old Queen snuffed out together': 'He'd always been an anachronism. He should have lived out his life under the Georges, before little Vic who loved dancing turned into Victoria the Good.'

After her husband's funeral, Rosa goes to place an order with a monumental mason, who tells her, 'Nowt would give me more pleasure and honour […] than to execute Sir Charles Ramillies' memorial in the exact style your ladyship has in mind. As to the head, if I might be supplied with a photograph –' which statement astonishes Rosa: 'It is not of my husband that I wish a statue […] but of my father.' (She has learned that the original statue of her father in South America has been over-turned.)

The new, life-size statue of George Ison is set up at the end of a laurel-alley in the garden, and is a complete success, until taste changes and becomes more sophisticated. Eventually, however, taste changes back again, 'and a Motorists' Guide of the nineteen-thirties starred George's statue as an example of late-Victorian craftsmanship':

> All the Ramillies children were to adore it anyway. The toe of the left boot was touch-point in every game of tag, to climb upon a marble shoulder proclaimed one King of the Castle; secrets were sworn (if necessary invented to be sworn) on the marble tie-pin. All the Ramillies children adored the statue – first Archy's then a new generation. Philip and Charles and Emma and Elizabeth called Rosa great-aunt only because great-great was too much of a mouthful for their young tongues […].

Rosa lives on with Miss Pomfret until she, too, dies, as does Mrs Ramillies. Sir Charles's heir Archy becomes Sir Archibald and marries an heiress. Rosa entertains them and their children every year at Christmas.

'Then, in the summer before the First World War Rosa, alone at the Hall as usual, one morning observed from the laurel-walk a stranger engaged in sketching the statue at its end.' She is fifty and has become stout: 'As her flesh blossomed, so had her capacity for affection. Until Archy brought his brood, there had been no call upon, no outlet for it. Sir Charles had sought a good housekeeper, a shield against his sister-in-law, and the potential mother of an heir, rather than a truly affectionate wife.' Rosa has an affair with the stranger she sees sketching the statue one day: a young journalist called Paul Braithwaite from a family of Sir Charles's tenants. He hopes to marry her but, remembering that her income is dependent on remaining a widow, she regretfully sends him away.

Sir Archy and his wife are killed in a car crash on the Riviera, and their son Roddy marries a woman called Daphne. Rosa dislikes Daphne, but she adores Roddy and Daphne's four children. 'The Hall was the children's

Paradise, their Alsatia; if to begin with a governess accompanied them, once past those welcoming gates no writ ran but Rosa's':

> There was no doubt that Rosa spoiled the children. But then she loved them so! Latinly, indulgently. It had taken her long, almost seventy years, to learn to love again. […] [The] children she loved as she'd loved no one but her father George Ison – and that so long ago, so long ago!

In the autumn of 1939, the children are evacuated to the Hall to be looked after by their great-great-aunt. Rosa's life appears to be redeemed by her love for her (late husband's) great-great-nephews and nieces, recalling the conclusion of *The Snow-Woman*.

However Margery Sharp adds a final, open-ended chapter. In September 1940, Rosa returns to London for a dinner celebrating Roddy's birthday. One of the first bombs to fall there causes several guests to leave; Roddy and Daphne, Daphne's lover, Rosa and the cook take refuge in the cellar. Suddenly 'the entire bulk of an inherited house in Mount Street crashed down and sealed them off':

> But a little air still percolated between the bars of a ventilator, and with it a little light, a not-quite-absolute-dark, from the wheeling searchlights overhead; and they had with them, besides soda, almost two litres of Evian and what water was still in the ice-bucket; it was simply a matter of waiting until a rescue-squad lifted the siege.

SUMMARY

A holiday in France is the point of departure in four novels by popular writers of the same generation. Margery Sharp's *Nutmeg Tree* dates from the 1930s, Daphne Du Maurier's *Scapegoat* and Rumer Godden's *Greengage Summer* from the 1950s, and Stella Gibbons's *Snow-Woman* from the 1960s; my book is organised according to the date that the holiday took place. The novelists seem not to have known each other, although all except Margery Sharp had the same agent. In each instance I have tried to discover as much as possible about the author's familiarity with the French language and culture, her stay in France and how it came about, where it took place and who was involved, and to relate this to the resulting novel, which is more or less briefly summarised.

The Greengage Summer looks back on the summer of 1923 when Rumer Godden's mother set out to take her daughters on 'a battlefield tour of France' but ended up in hospital. In their mother's absence, the children are initiated into drinking, smoking and various kinds of moral ambiguity. The names and descriptions of the author and her family, who play leading roles in the story, are somewhat modified. French, English and Australian sources lead to the surprising identification, for the first time, of the former soldier who inspired the main character.

Margery Sharp liked going to France, studied French at college and spent a month in Southern France in the summer of 1936. Julia Packett, the heroine of Sharp's 1937 novel, *The Nutmeg Tree*, is identified with the country from the opening sentence, in which she sings the *Marseillaise* in her bath. Her daughter, Susan, on the other hand, conceived during a very brief wartime marriage, is 'a prig from very excess of good qualities'. While steering Susan away from an unsuitable pursuer, Julia herself falls in love. Margery Sharp married a year after the novel was published.

In the autumn of 1955, Daphne Du Maurier travelled to the department of Sarthe to research French family history: that book, *The Glass-Blowers,* would not appear until 1963. The immediate product of her visit to Sarthe was *The Scapegoat*, narrated by John, a quiet, donnish, unmarried

Englishman who suddenly finds himself at the head of a dysfunctional French family. Du Maurier borrows a few names from the French branch of her family tree, but her stake in John's story seems ultimately to have been more personal. Her published letters and her biography, as well as her husband's biography, point to marital tensions in the years leading up to the novel and film of *The Scapegoat*.

In June 1966, Stella Gibbons accepted a friend's invitation to visit her in her summer home near Grenoble. Unlike the author, Maude Barrington, the septuagenarian narrator of *The Snow-Woman*, has never married. She is a piano accompanist who has spent her adult life mourning her three brothers who were killed in the First World War, and who has lived with her parents until their deaths. During her French holiday Maude reluctantly reconnects with a figure from her past and visits her brothers' graves. On returning home she is finally able to forgive, forget and gradually unfold a long-held secret that changes her life.

In 1969, when *The Snow-Woman* was published, all four novelists were in their sixties. An Afterword looks briefly at Du Maurier's *House on the Strand*, Godden's *In This House of Brede* and Sharp's *Rosa*, which also came out that year. Although they are not set in France, these novels are comparable to *The Snow-Woman* in their shared focus on a character coming to terms with the past.

NOTES AND FURTHER READING

CHAMPAGNE COUNTRY

The Greengage Summer (Macmillan, 1958) has been reprinted recently by Pan Books. A fuller version of the author's preface is found in *A Time to Dance, No Time to Weep*, the first volume of Godden's autobiography. *The Greengage Summer* is also discussed briefly in the second volume, *A House With Four Rooms*. See also Anne Chisholm's *Rumer Godden: A Storyteller's Life* (Macmillan, 1998).

The photograph of Violette Pullin appeared in the Los Angeles *Illustrated Daily News* on 26 June 1930. The photograph of Arnold Ruskin Treacher, 'train rat', is taken from 'Les écumeurs du rail', published in *Détective* 174 on 15 February 1932. 'Un "rat de train" et sa maîtresse ont été arrêtés à Calais' appeared in the newspaper *L'Avenir* on 15 August 1923. Walter G. Treacher's letter, headed, 'Why not make Australia a comfortable country?' was published in the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* on 12 June 1906. Arnold Ruskin Treacher's military record is available at the National Archives of Australia.

HOLIDAY AFFAIRS

The short story 'Risk' originally appeared in *The Sunday Post* of 17 February 1935 and was reprinted in *Mystery and Adventure Stories for Girls* (ed. Eric Duthie, Odhams Press, 1962). 'Still Waters' was published in the *Strand Magazine* in March 1938. *Four Gardens* (Collins, 1935) was reprinted in by Dean Street Press in 2021, with an introduction by Elizabeth Crawford. *The Nutmeg Tree* (Arthur Barker, 1937) was reprinted in 2018 by Open Road Integrated Media.

Claude Farrère's novel, *Mademoiselle Dax jeune fille*, was first published in 1907. E.V. Lucas's essay, 'Two Feasts', is reprinted in *Saunterer's Rewards* (Methuen, 1933). On the region of Belley, see also the bilingual

publication *Gertrude Stein & Bugey, 1924–1944* (Conseil Général de l'Ain, 2012), edited by Delphine Cano.

Carol Bird's interview with Margery Sharp, 'Should Girls Be Sheltered?', appeared in the *Oakland Tribune* of 24 April 1938. 'Humorous Novelist (English) Weds Englishman' was published in the *Baltimore Sun* on 27 November 1938.

TRADING PLACES

The Scapegoat (Victor Gollancz, 1957) was republished by Virago Modern Classics in 2004. Daphne Du Maurier's memoir, *Myself When Young*, originally titled *Growing Pains*, came out from Gollancz in 1977. See also Angela Du Maurier's memoir, *It's Only the Sister*, published by Peter Davies Ltd in 1951 and reprinted by Truran Books. *Letters from Menabilly: Portrait of a Friendship*, edited by Oriel Malet, was published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in 1993. Daphne's letter dated 4 July 1957 to Maureen Baker-Munton was published in the appendix to Margaret Forster's 1993 biography, *Daphne Du Maurier*. See also Noel Welch's article, 'The Du Mauriers', in the *Cornish Review* (Summer 1973). Richard Mead's *General 'Boy': The Life of Lieutenant General Sir Frederick Browning* was published by Pen & Sword in 2010.

At the time of the republication of *The Loving Spirit*, 'It made a name for Daddy's daughter' appeared in the *News Chronicle* of 7 May 1958. 'Dodged away', dated 20 June 1958, appeared in London's *Daily News*. Patrick Leigh Fermor's essay is reprinted in his book *A Time to Keep Silence* (John Murray, 1957).

SNOWMELT

Stella's article, 'C of E', was published in *St Martin's Review* in April 1957. 'Genesis of a Novel' appeared in the 20 April 1966 issue of *Punch*. *The Snow-Woman* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1969) was reprinted by Dean Street Press in 2021, with an introduction by Elizabeth Crawford. Reggie Oliver's *Out of the Woodshed: The Life of Stella Gibbons* was published by Bloomsbury in 1998. Elizabeth Coxhead's *One Woman's Garden* was published by J.M. Dent in 1971. See also Léo C. Burkhard's *Parménie, 'l'étonnante et fascinante histoire d'une petite colline dauphinoise …'* published by Grenoble's Imprimerie Eymond in 1976. The book on the monastic life that Daphne Du Maurier read and recommended was Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Against All Reason* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

AFTERWORD: NOVELS OF 1969

The House on the Strand was published by Victor Gollancz in 1969. The extract about walking-sticks is taken from Augustus Muir, 'Sir Gerald du Maurier – The Actor and the Man', in the *Strand Magazine* of January 1929. Daphne commented on her father's portrait and her DBE in a letter dated 17 June 1969 to Derek Whiteley (Sherborne School Archives, SS/OS/W/Whiteley, G.D.P/7/2). Dr Richard West recalls working for Dr Singer at Kilmarth in a life story interview that is part of the British Library's 'Oral History of British Sciences', online at sounds.bl.uk. *In This House of Brede* was published by Macmillan in 1969. *Rosa* was published by Heinemann in 1969.

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